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[THE RENEGADE.]

THE LOST CORONET.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"One Sparkle of Gold," "Evelyn's Plot," &c., &c.

CHAPTER VII.

The rose is fairest when 'tis budding new,
And hope is brightest when it dawns from fears,
The rose is sweetest washed with morning dew,
And love is loveliest when embalmed with tears.

"ETHEL, Countess of Mont Sorell, never had a child!" resounded in that splendid chamber like a trumpet clang, though spoken in Ruth Lovett's deliberate and mellow tones.

Like a trumpet it brought a proud thrill to the hearts of some; like a trumpet it sounded the knell of hope and happiness to others in that little group.

For a moment Pauline paled and staggered under the sudden blow; but there was the noble spirit if not the noble blood of an ancient race in her slight frame, and she proudly mastered the weakness that would thus easily believe in the guilt of one she had revered as a parent.

"It is an infamous falsehood," burst at length from Stanley Brereton's lips as he watched the changes in that lovely face, and glanced indignantly at him who should have been the first to support and defend her he professed to love. "Woman, you could be severely punished for such fraud," he added, fiercely.

But Pauline stepped forward with an air of calm yet soft dignity that well nigh daunted even Ruth's imperious insolence.

"Hush!" she said, turning to Brereton with a wan smile that pierced his very heart, "this is not a matter for mere angry threats, my kind friend. I cannot fear that it is true," she added, proudly, "but if false it will bring its own punishment."

"You need not trouble yourself about any punishment for me, young woman," returned Ruth, tauntingly; "though, indeed, it is but natural that you should have a kindly feeling for your own kith and kin, and be alarmed lest they should suffer."

"I do not fear for my kith and kin," said the girl, bravely. "I trust in the truth and honour of a noble mother, and I will not shame her by doubts till I

have proof that cannot be disputed. Aunt, dear Aunt Helena, calm yourself," she said, turning to Lady Claud, who was trembling so violently that she had sunk on a chair behind her. "Do not distress your gentle heart for me. This person's statement cannot be true, and if it is I must bear it," she murmured, in a low tone, rather to herself than those around her. "You never heard—you have no cause to credit it, have you, my second mother?" she added, pleadingly.

"None, my poor darling, none," faltered the agitated lady. "Only that woman looks so fierce, so determined, that—"

"That you feel you have no real cause to doubt it, my lady," interrupted Ruth, bitterly, "and you are as strange a mother as your late sister-in-law if you can be so frantic at your own daughter being restored to her rights. I suppose we humble folks do not understand grand and noble ladies' feelings, or a child's claim on them. But that is for you and the young Countess Estelle to settle between you. Yes," she added as she caught the exulting flash in the girl's eyes as the novel title fell on her ears, "there is one, at any rate, who will not brand me as a monster of cruelty for doing justice, and justice shall be done, in spite of taunts or tears."

"Your proofs?" said Pauline, with unnatural calmness. "You must feel that the tale is too improbable to be believed after all these years unless you can bring certain, full evidence to support it."

She spoke like one in a dream, so measured and so unflinching were the sweet tones of her voice, which in its usual accents displayed such perfect modulation.

"I will tell you all, account for all, prove all, in a very brief space," returned Ruth, a spasm of some strange uneasiness convulsing her features for an instant. "Only it may be as well for you to seat yourselves, good people," she said, sneeringly, glancing round at the group who stood in eager, strained attitudes of attention near her. "I will not detain you long, but I can relate my story better when you are not ready to spring like tigers on every word."

"Shall I leave you? I am a stranger, and it may be painful for you to have family secrets spoken be-

fore me," said Stanley, bending over the chair which he unobtrusively placed for the pale young countess.

"No, no—stay. If it is true all must know it; if false you will guide and counsel me," she answered, in the same low tone.

She did not even invite or reproach Quentin Oliphant by a look, though a stranger took the place he should have occupied, and the betrothed husband stood aloof in moody suspense from her he had well nigh sworn to protect and cherish through weal or woe.

She sat motionless and calm, her eyes fixed on Ruth's harsh though fine features, her small hands clasped, her lips closed firmly as if to restrain the least moan of the pain that might await her.

"I will begin by asking Lady Claud De Vesce to confirm such statements of my tale as she knows to be true," commenced Ruth, doling out by drops, as it were, the torture she had to pour on that fair young head. "She can witness that for some five years of their marriage the Earl and Countess of Mont Sorell had no child, nor was it till you, Lady Claud, had the prospect of such a blessing that it was suddenly discovered that the countess was as fortunate as yourself. Am I not correct in this?"

Lady Claud bowed her head, she had no voice to speak the assent she could not deny.

"Nor, as your ladyship may perhaps remember, though engrossed by your own interests at the time, was the heir of Mont Sorell and its wide lands born either in 'The Towers,' the ancient and chief seat of the De Vesces, or in this stately mansion, where all the skill of the metropolis would have been available on so important an occasion. It was at the more humble and secluded dwelling known as the Mount House, and intended for a dower house of the widowed Countesses of Mont Sorell, that the wonderful event took place, and the infant of high hopes and promise born. Again I ask you do I speak truly, my Lady Claud?"

"Yes," came low and faintly from the lady's lips, "you are right so far."

"So far, and in all things," returned the woman. "It is but a vain mockery to prolong the indisput-

able and disgraceful narration of sin and ambition. The Most House was chosen because it was in so remote and secluded a spot, and the doctor who could be summoned in case of need was so dull and mechanical a tool that the desperate game of falsehood and fraud could be carried on with more safety.

"Of course it was possible for the infant to be born ere long miles could be traversed by servant and surgeon. Of course the handsome fee would dazzle any inconvenient sharpness of vision. And of course the attendant of a countess could silence any perplexity or doubt by her own diploma and experienced knowledge.

"It was admirably arranged. Even the sex of the infant precluded suspicion as to any ulterior and sinister views. But the succession was secured in any case, and when Lady Claud had given birth to a daughter it was but a matter of coincidence that a girl should also crown or disappoint the hopes of the head of the house.

"It was a deep and successful plot, but like other frauds ample proof for its discovery was afforded, and the child of obscure and humble parents was not to usurp the heritage of a nobler line of ancestors."

Ruth paused as if to contemplate her auditors, and read the various emotions that agitated them. The scrutiny seemed satisfactory, for she went on with a more impetuous air of triumph.

"Lady Mont Sorell, in her childless despair, turned to one who had been the favoured retainer of the De Vesici from early childhood. Yes," she added, drawing up her tall figure to its full height, with a haughty defiance of the trembling women before her, "I too had an ancestry and an hereditary right. My fathers had been in the service of the Earls of Mont Sorell for many a generation, and I, Ruth Lovett, had been born under their very roof. It was small wonder that Lady Mont Sorell confided to me the grief that poisoned her very life, and clouded her every sunbeam. And it was small wonder if I, in the enthusiasm of youth, devoted myself to the hazardous task she demanded at my hands.

"The wife of my only brother, then far distant, and engaged in the duties of his sailor life, was in expectation of the event that to her could but bring hardship and struggling care. That child would complete the happiness of the high-born countess, and secure to itself wealth and luxury and rank such as the wildest dreams of its parent could hardly picture. It was a sore temptation. I persuaded myself that I was doing my duty to my hereditary superiors and to the sole relative that was left to me by giving my aid in carrying out the scheme.

"The details of the plot were not difficult to arrange, and the child of Nicholas and Marian Lovett was passed off as the heiress of the title and estates of Mont Sorell."

Pauline's face had blanched to an ashen hue as Ruth went on with her too probable and convincing tale, while Estelle had veiled her own irrepressible exultation by shrinking within the partial shelter of the heavy curtains in the side bay window of the saloon.

Stanley Brereton alone fixed his piercing eyes with an incredulous gaze on Ruth's rigidly controlled features.

"The proof," he said, sternly, "the proof, woman. Do you suppose the heiress of such vast honours and estates can take a cunningly devised tale as her warrant for their renunciation?"

"I neither suppose nor fear any caprice of hers or yours, young man," replied Ruth, contemptuously. "I have ample evidence of the truth I speak. The nurse who attended the supposed mother is still living, and willing to attest the fraud to which she was a heavily bribed accomplice. The doctor, who was not summoned till the arrival of the child, is dead, but there are those who can swear to his absence at the time of the imaginary birth. And, to crush every remaining doubt, I will bring forward an irresistible witness, a voice as it were from the dead, a document still in the possession of its rightful and living owner."

She walked to the door with the air of one to whom the exercise of authority was no novel office, and called, in a quick, low tone:

"Nicholas, come here; you are needed."

Pauline's eyes were dilated with an unnatural light, in their strained orbs as she gazed on the figure that darkened the doorway and advanced into the room. For a moment she could not recall the association with those familiar features, that awkwardly hung form.

Then it flashed suddenly upon her. It was the amateur waiter of the birthnight ball, the insolent bandier of words with Quentin Oliphant, and she comprehended in an instant the cause of the strange familiarity he had dared to display.

He walked, or rather strode, insolently into the room.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, what is it?" he said, carelessly. "Don't you believe my sister here? because if you don't you're uncommonly green or blind yourselves. Does any one here know the handwriting of the late Countess of Mont Sorell?"

Because, if so, I've a bit of paper here that will settle the business."

He looked defiantly round as he spoke, then, for the first time, Quentin Oliphant mingled in the discussion.

"Lady Claud, of course you are well acquainted with the handwriting of your late relative. You can test any attempt at that kind of imposition. Will you be so kind as to settle this part of the argument by your opinion?"

Nicholas walked without scruple to the chair where Lady Claud sat, scarcely mistress of her bodily or mental powers, under the bewildering shock they had undergone, and held out to her a folded sheet of paper.

"There, fair and softly, my lady! I don't suppose a grand dame like yourself would do anything shabby, especially when her own daughter's going to be benefited by the decision; but I'd rather keep it in my own hands, if it's all the same to you, and you'll see it just as well as if you had it yourself."

He held up the paper before her half-dazzled eyes, and it was some minutes before she could clear her vision sufficiently to discern the lines it contained. But there was a sad astonishment painted on her gentle features as she read the fatal and irrefutable words, penned in the well-known graceful characters of her late sister-in-law.

"I, Ethel, Countess of Mont Sorell, engage to receive and bring up and provide for the infant child of Nicholas and Marian Lovett as my own, and to give her all the privileges and rights of such a position; with the sum of one thousand pounds as compensation for her deliverance up to my sole charge and adoption, on condition that she shall be left to my undisputed authority and care for the rest of her natural life."

(Signed) "ETHEL MONT SORELL."

"Is that my lady countess's writing, eh?" said the man, coarsely, as Lady Claud removed her eyes from the document and gazed fearfully on Pauline's silent figure.

"I believe it is, to the best of my knowledge," she said, hoarsely.

"That's candid, anyhow. Now, then, I think there isn't much left before the business can be finished. I don't suppose any of you are in any doubt about the matter, so, to cut the thing short, I may as well claim my daughter at once. She'll be useful to me, I daresay, when I get a bit older, though I've not been much used to such an embarrassment for many a long year!"

He stepped up to Pauline's chair, and attempted to take her hand.

"Come, give me a kiss, my lass. Better late than never, though you've been without a father so long. I'm out of practice, or I'd do a little blessing and all that sort of thing. Why, what's the matter? This is a queer way for a daughter to treat a long-lost parent!"

It was too much even for the well-sustained bravery of that high-minded girl.

She sprang up with a wild, irrepressible terror from the loathed, coarse embrace that was threatening her delicate lips.

"Quentin, Quentin, save me!" burst from her overcharged heart.

She looked imploringly at her betrothed lover, with her soul's agony painted in her beautiful eyes, her ashen cheeks, her quivering lips.

Perhaps he hesitated for a moment. There was almost more than man could resist in the appealing piteousness of that heart-broken cry.

Then the coarse, plebeian laugh of Nicholas Lovett came on his ear. Estelle's astonished look of disgust seemed to flash on his very brain as she bent forward to catch the next gesture, the next word that might decide the fate of her rival.

It was enough. His last spark of magnanimity withered under those brilliant eyes.

He turned coldly from Pauline's eager gaze. She saw it—read it aright. Her senses reeled, and she fell fainting into the arms that Stanley Brereton hastily extended to save her.

"Are you a man, and can you endure that?" he exclaimed, indignantly, to Lord Quentin, as he pointed to her pale, closed eyes and motionless form. Quentin quailed under that intensity of scorn, which made him feel his own base weakness, but he shrunk from even one look or act that might compromise his selfish fears.

"I cannot avert the misfortune, though I may regret it," he said, coldly. "I have had no part in the fraud—indeed I may consider myself as one of its victims. Lady Claud, may I suggest that you and your daughter had better not be exposed longer to this painful scene?"

"No, no, I cannot leave her thus, my poor, poor child!" said the weeping Lady Claud as Lord Quentin offered his arm to conduct her from the room. "She will die! You have killed her!" she added, hysterically, to the half-daunted Nicholas, who still stood regarding the fair, fragile girl he claimed as his child.

"Not a bit, not a bit, my lady; young folks are not so easily finished off. She will come round and get quite reconciled in a jiffy. Still I must say that Springald seems in an uncommon hurry to get rid of a pretty little girl for his wife, just because she loses her money and the handle to her name, and if she's wise she'll soon forget such a fair-weather swain."

"Miss De Vesici, allow me to take you from the room. This coarse ribaldry is unfit for your ears," said Quentin, utterly transported with mortified rage. "Lady Claud, I presume I have your permission for so doing?" he added, drawing Estelle's hand in his arm.

The mother inclined her head in assent.

Perhaps she was not sorry to free herself from the restraint of that imperious daughter, whose haughty nature would be now ungovernable in its sudden elevation.

She longed to clasp that stricken one to her heart, to whisper words of love and sympathy, to mingle her tears with the weeping victim of others' wrong.

"You will not—you cannot press her farther," she said, pleadingly, to the brother and sister, who stood like evil spirits triumphing over the ruin they had wrought.

"They shall not. It would be simply murder—barbarous, cruel murder. I will not permit it," thundered Stanley Brereton, passionately.

"Will not, young man; and pray who is to prevent a father doing what he pleases with his child?" said Nicholas, sneeringly. "You'd better draw in your sails, young sir; or you may chance to get toppled over for your pains. However," he added, turning to Lady Claud, with a shade more pity in his look as he gazed at Pauline, "I don't see what I can do with a sick young girl just now, so she can stop here a bit till she's come to her bearings, and made up her mind to obey the helm. I'll fetch her to-morrow, my lady."

"Not till the case is more fully proved, if I may venture to counsel you, Lady Claud," said Stanley, firmly. "As a barrister, I can assure you that quite as well-sustained tales as this one have been disproved times without number; as a man of ordinary sympathy for one so gifted and so stricken, I implore you to give her time to rally from such a frightful blow."

"She shall decide for herself when she gets her senses again," said Ruth, who had stood with a strange, deliberate gaze fixed on the young sufferer that spoke of a well-satisfied, long-looked-for triumph. "I suspect she will not be very anxious to stay in the scene of her degradation, and see her rival established in her rightful position. Come, Nicholas, our task is done. To-morrow we will return to escort your daughter to her new home, with any belongings that Lady Mont Sorell's kindness may permit her to take with her from her long-usurped wealth."

She passed her hand through her brother's arm as she spoke, and impelled him towards the door. But Stanley Brereton hastily interposed between them and the half-open portal.

"One moment, Mr. Lovett, and you who scarcely ought to bear the name of woman from your fiendish cruelty," he said, sternly. "I shall assume the task which ought to belong to others, and investigate to the very bottom the tale you tell. That writing may be forged for aught we know. Where is the accomplice of your guilt—the nurse, whose evidence should be given to complete any rational proof? Let her identity be established undeniably before you dare to act on and triumph in your wickedness."

"Softly, young upstart! Don't crow so loudly, or you may get your neck twisted," returned Nicholas, fiercely. "You've been a bit too meddling already, and I won't stand any more of your insolence, I promise you. If the girl and her supposed relatives and her young lord of a lover are satisfied, I don't suppose you've anything to say in the matter; and, what's more, when I've got this would-be countess back at her proper home I'll thank you not to come whining and filling her head with rebellion and nonsense; for, if you do, all I can say is you'll get the worst of it, and she as well. Come along, Ruth. We'll be punctual in the morning, my lady, and if we don't get justice I'll go to the nearest magistrate in a twinkling."

Then, with a fierce defiance to Stanley in his mocking nod, and a pretentiously obsequious bow to Lady Claud, the pair departed.

"What can be done? What dreadful misery for this poor child—yet it seems hopeless," sobbed Lady Claud, wringing her hands helplessly. "Mr. Brereton, I would give up, gladly, thankfully, this ill-omened inheritance for my own daughter could I recall this last terrible hour and place Pauline again in her former position."

"I believe it, dear lady; and if there is one atom of falsehood in their story it shall be sifted out, if it cost me my very life," said Stanley, his teeth compressed painfully in his effort to restrain the tempest of indignation and grief that convulsed his manly frame to the very centre. "But we must

think of her—of Lady Mont Sorell," he said, turning to the still-motionless form that lay, with closed eyes, on the couch where he had placed her. "Shall I ring for assistance to restore her to consciousness now that they have relieved the air of their polluting presence?"

"Alas! alas! it is but cruelty. My poor, poor, child! Better let her remain there than wake up to such misery," returned the lady.

Stanley was about to carry out his intention, in spite of Lady Claud's helpless wail, when Pauline gave a deep sigh, succeeded by some gasps for breath, that spoke of returning animation; and the next moment she opened her eyes, and gazed wildly around.

"Where am I? What has happened?" she asked, in broken, faint murmurs. "Where is Quentin? I—I thought he was here, and—"

But as she tried to raise herself, and glanced at the pale, terror-stricken face of her weeping aunt, then at Stanley Brereton's look of rigid, stern sorrow, the truth seemed to flash on her bewildered senses, as if an Eri King blast had passed over them.

"Yes, yes, I remember. Those dreadful words, and that man. Oh, mercy, mercy! Save me, save me!" burst involuntarily from her pale lips. "He—he cannot be my father. I cannot bear it."

She buried her face in the cushions, in a burst of hysterical sobbing that tortured the very heart of him who listened, helpless, hopeless, as to the means of averting the dreadful calamity that threatened her he loved.

"My Pauline, my darling, you will break my heart! No, no, you shall not go. Estelle shall not cause such misery to one so innocent," exclaimed Lady Claud, eagerly. "We can arrange it, perhaps. Money will do much, will it not, Mr. Brereton? It was all so sudden. I had not time to think; but now—"

She did not finish the sentence, for Pauline's arms were round her neck and Pauline's white fingers on her lips ere the next words could be spoken. The burst of grief was hushed, and the pale girl stood with a woe-stricken calmness on her lovely face, even more heart-breaking than the wildest emotion.

"Hush, dearest aunt—I mean dear, dear Lady Claud!" she said, firmly. "Forgive my weakness. I was selfish to distress you thus. But please do not even speak of such dishonour again. It shames—it tortures me that I should be thought capable of such baseness. No, no. If it is true at least I can keep my innocence. I have done nothing wrong; and I am ready, quite ready, to give up all, and go away from my—usurpation," she added, with a wan smile, that nearly drove Stanley Brereton frantic.

"But not to him, that fiend!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "That shall not be, so long as I have strength and means to defend you from such a fate. Pauline, Pauline," he added, clasping his hands in supplication that had more humility in it than he would have displayed to the Countess of Mont Sorell, "do not disdain, do not deem me insulting, presumptuous in daring to say what would never have escaped my heart while I knew you were another's in love and truth. But, oh, Pauline, here, in the presence of one who has been as a mother to you, I implore you to listen and grant my prayer. I love you, I have loved you as a man might worship a bright, distant star, which makes all else seem dark and worthless to him. I am poor, yet of a birth which is not quite unworthy even of a De Vescei, but that I am out off by my poverty from the kindred I might claim. Pauline, be mine; let me shelter my precious wife from the grasp of that hateful man who dared to call himself your father. I can write; I will work even with my hands, if my brain be unable to win a living for us both. I will cherish you as my dearest jewel—the blessing of my dark life—if you will deign to listen to me, my beloved, my injured one."

Stanley had poured out his words like a torrent that could not be stopped till it had spent itself in passionate vehemence.

He clasped Pauline's hand in his, he knelt at her feet as she sat supported in her aunt's arms; then he waited breathlessly for her reply.

"Lady Claud, plead for me," he murmured as he saw the girl's lips move, and dreaded the fiat they would pronounce.

Twice she essayed to speak, that fair, trembling girl, ere she dared trust her voice or crush back the burst of sobs that choked her utterance.

She had nerved herself for endurance; she could have borne with hardship and neglect, but the voice of love and tenderness and the noble generosity of this offer were overwhelming to an already over-tired, crushed heart.

"No, no," she said, at length, "kind, noble, generous that you are, it must not—cannot be. I could not," she added, sadly, "I could not think of such things now, though all is over to which you allude, and nothing should induce me to bring disgrace and ruin upon one whom I honour and esteem so truly. Leave me now, please," she said, with a

childlike pleading in her voice and look, "and forget poor Pauline and her troubles. They must not cloud your heart."

"But that man, that fiend, I cannot yield you to him," said Stanley, sadly. "Pauline, if you cannot love me at least give me a right to save and protect you from him."

"Hush! He is my father," she said, shudderingly. "I owe him duty, and he shall have it. Heaven will protect me," she added, raising her beautiful eyes upwards, "and in it I trust."

"You are an angel!" exclaimed Stanley, impetuously, "an angel far above me or any mortal man; yet, oh, Pauline, there are demons and dangers on earth that your pure innocence cannot even figure to yourself. Do not drive me from you, dearest, best-beloved. I will not forsake you. I will haunt your footsteps, watch your very shadow, give up my very life for you, ere I can surrender you to such a fate."

"Not if you really love me, really desire my happiness," said the girl, drawn as it were from her own wretchedness by the spectacle of his utter despair.

"Give me the blessing of a pure conscience, kindest friend, unstained by the burden of another's ruin, and I shall not be all miserable. Leave me; I cannot bear more now," she added, faintly. "I need rest and quiet, to prepare for what lies before me."

Stanley was fain to obey her behest. His worship was too devoted to resist such pleading. His own noble nature responded too entirely to hers not to comprehend her motives, her generous devotion to high duty.

Still, as he obeyed, and withdrew from the presence that was light and joy to his very being, he vowed that from that instant Pauline Lovett should be the first object of his every thought and action, and her safety purchased at the cost of his own. It was a vow not lightly made, nor was it broken by that noble, manly soul.

And Pauline, in the bitter solitude of the chamber to which she slowly and falteringly bent her steps, had no softening gleam in her dark dread, no sweetness in her cup of gall, save that unselfish, tender love.

CHAPTER VIII.

Then say'st thou only canst to prove

What my affections were.

Think'st thou that love is helped by fear?

Go, get thee quickly forth!

"ESTELLE, dear Estelle, let me be the first to congratulate you, my beautiful countess," whispered Lord Quentin as he lingeringly conducted the silent but intoxicated girl along the broad staircases and corridors.

"Intoxicated?" Yes; not with the wine that casts its degrading but transient fumes up into the brain, but with the far more dangerous and permanent giddiness of one who walks on a height where only a cool and steady step can save from fatal misadventure, either to himself or those who rely on his guidance for safety in life's paths.

"It is strange. Surely you should mourn rather than rejoice, Lord Quentin," said the girl, with affected displeasure. "Poor damsel! that we are, we trust to broken reeds when we believe in love and lovers' vows. Are you going to worship the rising sun, false worshipper of the setting planet?"

"Estelle, Heaven is my witness that there is no such falseness in my soul," said the young nobleman, fervently. "You must have long seen, in your inmost heart, the respect of mine. You must have known how I was torn by conflicting feelings, how the hotroth of Pauline was the lover—say, rather, the worshipper—of her fairer, more conquering cousin."

"You have certainly concealed much conflicts till it was safe to reveal them," returned Estelle, satirically.

"Till it was possible to yield to them with even a shadow of honour," he responded, fervently. "I appeal to yourself, Estelle—I could appeal to the unfortunate girl who has just sustained such a reverse of fortune—whether I had not again and again complained of her wayward lightness, her indifference to my desires and wishes; and had such pretext been certainly given, I should infallibly have broken the promises that bound me, and flown to the real magnet of my soul. It was but a brief space since that I justly complained of the encouragement she gave to the upstart who played so conspicuous a part in the scene we have just witnessed."

"Perhaps she will be at liberty now to indulge such fancies unrestrained," said Estelle, carelessly. "But still I am too proud to accept such rapid transfer, Lord Quentin. I do not consider that your hand and heart go with the title and estates of Mont Sorell, I assure you."

"Estelle, do not drive me mad!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "I would endure any probation, suffer any test you can impose, to satisfy the pride that so well becomes you, and convince your distracting

doubts. I tell you I have loved you in secret; I have been tortured by the struggles I have endured to preserve the honour of my race unscathed by treachery to a plighted vow. Now I am free—free in the sight of any tribunal; and I am your slave, lovely, brilliant queen of my heart, my destiny, my life!"

Estelle De Vescei had panted to hear such words from those lips that now poured them forth so passionately. She had suffered pangs of jealous hate that only her haughty spirit could have concealed as she watched Quentin Oliphant's devotion to her heiress cousin, and asked herself, bitterly, why Pauline was to engross all she most coveted of fortune and love and happiness.

Yet now, when her lover, her beloved, was at her feet, she turned coldly from his pleading.

"Not yet, Lord Quentin. I must have time to think, and cause to trust, ere I give you one ray of hope. The world shall never sneer at Estelle De Vescei's credulity; nor will I even dream of considering the protestations of Pauline, Countess of Mont Sorell's faithless suitor, till their sincerity is well tested. One thing I do believe; had you ever loved Pauline you could not thus have deserted her in her need, her dire extremity."

"Yet you doubt my love for you, Estelle," he said, bitterly.

"That is perfectly consistent. Your love may be for the Countess of Mont Sorell. If I were to lose the name, and all that belongs to it, you might discover that your vows to me had been a delusion."

His pride was stung at last.

"If you believe it, Estelle," he said, angrily, "let it be as you say. Let all be over between us. Only remember you may entertain the same doubts of any suitor you may hereafter see at your feet. They may all worship at the golden shrine; and you will some day repeat spurning away one who had been the true and passionate lover of Estelle De Vescei long ere her sudden elevation to rank and fortune. Farewell, Countess of Mont Sorell. After all, I may have done Pauline some injustice. It is but the caprice and coquetry of her sex that I mistook for coldness and treachery."

He was turning away as they reached the luxurious morning-room that had been the common sitting apartment of the cousins.

Estelle gazed after him for a few moments. Her hand trembled on the look, her proud features had a gust of contending passions sweeping over their brilliant beauty.

There came one word, soft as music in her lover's ears.

"Quentin!"

He turned for a moment, but did not immediately obey the summons.

"Quentin, come back to me—to Estelle," she said.

"To Estelle, or to the countess?" he said, doubtfully, as he again stood at her side.

"To both," she said as she passed into the small, elegant saloon. "Estelle is willing to bestow all that belongs to the countess on one she loves and who truly loves her. But not yet, Quentin. Not a word or whisper of such an idea must escape your lips till I give you leave; and that leave will only be won by patrician and knightly services." She added, smiling: "Remember, I promise nothing; but, if you deserve it, you may, perhaps, win the prize which you have been the first to claim. Now go—quick; I would not that even a servant should see you here."

He pressed her hand to his lips, and kissed it with a hot, passionate fervour with which he dared not have touched Pauline's pure, maiden palm. Then he hurried away, and in a moment had crossed the hall, and left the house which he had entered with such different views and feelings.

"The first," mused Estelle as she cast herself in a chair, "the first; scarcely—yet, in one sense, he is. At least, my first—my only love. Yet shall love quench ambition, now that is blazing before me, ready at my simple word to light my path to the very summit? Not yet, not yet. I must see and touch and taste ere my choice is made: 'Estelle, Countess of Mont Sorell.' Yes, a strawberry-leaf coronet would not be too heavy for this lofty brow; and it may yet rest with myself whether to place it there or to trample it under my feet."

Then, rising, she surveyed her figure, still brilliant in her court costume; and her imagination pictured the magnificence of her next appearance on such a scene, till her very brain became dizzy, and she was fain to ring for her maid and calm the tumult that pervaded her whole frame by the more practical business of disrobing from her unwonted daylight splendour.

"Well, you've done it, old girl; I must confess that," said Nicholas Lovett, half sullenly, throwing himself into a chair, when he and Ruth once more found themselves in their humble lodgings, that looked darker and more dismal than ever after the luxurious apartments they had just quitted. "Yes,

from my soul, I'm half inclined to draw back even now. I'm as hard as a flint and as fierce as a lion where men are in the case—say, and women, too, when the fit's on me; but that girl looks so like an angel it seems as if some dire calamity would befall me if she were humbled and crushed under my own hand. Ruth, I tell you it's an ugly business."

"So are some other of your transactions that I could tell you of, Nicholas; and, if I mistake not, there are dark actions in your life that even I only vaguely suspect, but which would scarcely baffle me were I to feel inclined to hunt them from their hiding-place. There, don't be an infatuated idiot, Nicholas. Why should you hesitate to claim your own child if it suits you to do so? If she has been brought up daintily that's no business of yours. She must learn to come down to her true position. She has kept the right one out of it long enough."

"Is she my own child? Are you not deceiving me, as well as you have done the great folks who have been bamboozled so long?" he asked, significantly. "Mark me, you'd better make a clean breast of it if you are, for I swear to you I'd never forgive being deceived, or exposed to grief by you; and you know pretty well I'm not to be trifled with, Madam Ruth."

"Was Marian Morris your lawful wife? Am I your lawful sister?" returned Ruth, scornfully. "Because you might as well doubt your own kith and kin as doubt your right to this same dainty Pauline. I tell you, Nicholas, if it were the last word I had to speak in this world, if a whole army of inquisitors were dragging the truth from my lips, I could not vary in the assertion I now make—ay, swear to you, if you will. Ethel, Countess of Mont Sorrell, never had a child from her birth to her death, and in her grief and her mortification she was tempted to commit the fraud which has just been revealed, and to bring from mortals the blessing denied her by Heaven."

"And my wife, Marian, could sell her child for gold? It was not like her," he said, doubtfully.

"She was on her death-bed, Nicholas. You were away; you might never have returned, and her babe would be a countess. Was it not a temptation? Can you be surprised that she yielded to it when weak and ill and alone? It is rather for you to forgive the wrong she committed than to insult me with injurious doubts," she added, sternly.

"I cannot disbelieve you, Ruth, when you talk sense like that, and you have certainly good proof in that agreement and the old nurse's word," he returned.

"I have sworn it, and I was never perjured, whatever you may have been," she retorted, bitterly. "The rack itself could not drag the truth more than you have heard from my lips."

"Well, well, all right, old girl," he said, returning to his usual coarse manner. "Then to-morrow we'll finish the business, and bring the girl to her rightful home. But I've just one word to say, Ruth, once and for all. You've had your way so far, and managed the whole business and had the cream of the profit. Now I'm going to have my turn. If this girl is really my daughter, as I cannot doubt after the solemn oath you have taken, I must have the authority of a father over her, and I've my own plans for her already, that you are not to meddle with; nor are you to come between her and me if she should go whining to you, or you fancy you could manage her better, or that I am hard on her. You understand, Ruth?"

"Oh, certainly. I've no wish to protect her," she returned, sneeringly. "She has had her day, and now she must take her chance, as she would have done if you'd brought her up from a child. But I fancy you'll find it rather a queer charge, Nicholas, to have a young girl on your hands, after the life you have led from your youth up. As for me, I've other plans. I rather think I shall stipulate for a position in the new Countess of Mont Sorrell's establishment, in return for my good offices. It will suit me better now I'm getting into years than your style of housekeeping, Nicholas."

"Haumph! you're a queer one, Ruth. I'd never have thought you'd go to live with the widow and daughter of Claud De Vesci. But women would puzzle the Sphinx with their caprices; and I suppose you're too old to remember your old lover, even with hate, as I always thought you would till your dying day."

Ruth laughed bitterly.

"Yes, yes, that's it. I'm too old. Yes, yes, too old, too old for love or hate!"

(To be continued.)

AUSTRALIAN MEAT.—In proof of the growing popularity of Australian meat in Great Britain, it was stated by Lord Alfred Churchill at a meeting in the London Tavern recently that the value of the sales in this country amounted last year to 500,000. There is no doubt that the large quantity of so-called Australian meat which is notoriously manufactured in this country has injuriously

affected the sale of the real article; but this is an evil which the adoption of a few simple precautions on the part of both the Australian companies and of the public ought speedily to overcome.

MAGGIE LYNN.

Of course it was very wrong and very foolish,
He never should have loved sweet Maggie
Lynn;

But then she was so fair and so bewitching,
With dainty dimples in her cheek and chin.

And could she help it if her face was lovely,
And every movement full of wondrous grace?
And how could he with his deep love of beauty
Help but admire the sweetness of her face?

And then they were so young, and that glad summer
Seemed only made for love and flowers and song,

And such a bit of sweet romance attended
Their first chance meeting, who shall deem it
wrong?

Her fingers, that a queen might well have envied,
Were fluttering 'mid the perfumed blossoms
there,

The dancing sunbeams sported all around her,
And touched with gold the burnished chestnut
hair.

The rounded cheeks were flushed with health and
pleasure

As there she stood, a queen among the flowers,
The rippling voice, soft as a dove's low cooing,
Sang out its welcome to those joyous hours.

So first she burst on his enraptured vision
In all her dainty loveliness and grace.
He wondered who she was, this winsome maiden
With such a sylph-like form and peerless face.

But presently the soft brown eyes were lifted,
And in a moment she had hushed her song;
She saw his look of wondering admiration,
And would have fled the flower-strewn path
along.

"Nay," he said, gently, "pardon this intrusion,
Nor let me fright you from this fair retreat,
But, resting for awhile beneath these lindens,
The beauty of the scene had chained my feet."

And then he talked about the summer flowers,
And helped her gather roses fresh and fair,
The while his eyes drank in her sweet young
beauty,

Her quiet grace and unassuming air.

Oh, better had it been for winsome Maggie,
And better for himself I ween as well,
If he had left her there among the roses
While the June sunbeams softly round her fell.

But very charming were those hours to Ronald,
And passing sweet to pretty Maggie Lynn.
Who could he be, this clever, handsome stranger,
Whose eloquence she drank delighted in?

He talked of poetry, and flowers, and music,
And charmed. She listened, in a dreamy way.
Surely the sun had never shone so brightly
Or nature seen so fair and bright a day.

And so they lingered till the day was fading,
And wondered that the time so short had
been;

And then they said farewell beneath the lindens,
Each with a hope that they might meet again.

Oh, Maggie, Maggie, surely reason told you
That you should try the stranger to forget,
But that one draught of pleasure was too
tempting,

Its subtle sweetness lingered even yet.

And so next day, with heart that fluttered
strangely,
And cheeks all flushed, and bright, expectant
eyes,

She sat again among the fragrant roses,
Beneath the glory of the summer skies.

And pretty Maggie knew no disappointment,
For what she longed for really came to pass,
For very soon with joy she saw him coming,
And heard his footsteps bounding o'er the
grass.

Again she heard the voice so soft and winning
Whose accents she would never more forget;
Once more he feasted on her wondrous beauty,
But neither dreamed of any danger yet.

And so, without a thought beyond the present,
They heedlessly pursued their pleasant way,
And took sweet rambles in the dewy evenings,
And met beneath the lindens every day.

And soon he grew to love the gentle maiden
So far beneath him in the world's vain eyes,
But rich in nature's choicest gifts and blessings,
And so they lived an earthly Paradise.

But very bitter was the rude awaking
To those young hearts from that bright summer's dream:

An angry father came with cruel threatnings,
And turned the current of their young life's
stream.

"A fortune, title, home, and my affection,
Or only Maggie Lynn, he sternly said;
And brave young Ronald, well nigh broken
hearted,
Heard the harsh verdict with an inward dread.

He knew his father's will was unrelenting,
And home and fortune were not lightly prized;
But give up Maggie—nay, the thought was torture
All for her dear sake must be sacrificed.

But winsome Maggie, though so sweet and gentle,
Had no small share of independent pride;
And though young Ronald o'en with tears en-
treated

She steadily refused to be his bride.

"I could not enter where I was not welcome,
Nor ever know a moment's happiness;
And though I never, never, can forget you
I must not look again upon your face."

And so they parted 'neath the dying lindens,
And Ronald left his lordly home awhile;
And Maggie pined and faded with the roses,
And lost her sunny look and witching smile.

And Ronald married, but his life was blighted,
Nor knew his heart a moment's tranquil rest,
For though his bride was wealthy, fair, and gentle,
He knew he loved his bonnie wild flower best.

And Maggie did not die, but lived and suffered,
And never wed, though many came to woo.
"I could not love, and so I will not marry,"
So to her first love she was ever true.

Oh, there are many who love thus unwisely,
Whose lives are spoiled and saddened all too
soon,

O'er whom life's evening shadows seem to gather
E're yet with them it scarcely should be noon.
Yet who shall blame them, or find heart to
censure?

The heart is only human after all,
And prone to sigh for what it least should covet—
Has it not been so ever since the fall?

Oh, life has much of joy and much of sorrow,
And every heart knows its own bitterness.
Then judge not harshly, for a heart that's breaking
Is often hid behind a smiling face.

E. W. E. A.

SCIENCE.

LIGHTING BY ELECTRICITY.—The street lamps of Göttingen were lit simultaneously, for the first time, on Saturday, the 16th ult., by electricity.

We are informed from Melbourne that the overland telegraph has been established 1,200 miles to the northward. It is proposed to bridge over the intervening distance, and the service probably over the whole line will be in operation in four months.

A NEW GUN-COTTON.—Some experiments for showing an improved quality of gun-cotton, as made by Mr. Punshon, took place within the last few days at Wormwood Scrubbs. Mr. Punshon claims to be able to produce a gun-cotton of any required explosive quality, so as to suit any purpose for which it may be wanted, and at the same time insure perfect uniformity of manufacture. He also states that by his treatment the difficulty of stowage is got rid of, and that his gun-cotton may be stored dry without any liability to decomposition and consequent spontaneous explosion. He accomplishes his objects by covering the particles of gun-cotton with sugar, with chlorate of potash or other salts, so as to separate the particles of the cotton, and by varying the proportions and quantities of these materials to suit the special explosive quality required. These experiments, however, were simply to test the quality of the cotton, as prepared for rifle shooting, compared with gunpowder. The cartridges contained fifty grains of cotton, and were tried against gunpowder cartridges containing fifty, seventy, and eighty-four grains. The first trial was against a target composed of fourteen pine boards, of one inch thick, clamped together, and at twenty-five yards' distance. In this case the bullets in each instance, passed through all the boards, and splashed against the iron target behind; but at the longer distances up to two hundred yards the gun-cotton still penetrated, while the gunpowder cartridges containing seventy and ultimately eighty-four grains had to be used to effect the same amount of penetration. At five hundred yards the shooting from the shoulder with the gun-cotton cartridges was regular and good.



[JOE CONGO AND HIS RAFT.]

ADA ARGYLE.

CHAPTER IX.

Hope elevates, and joy
Brightens his crest. Milton.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when the rescuing party, ten in number, embarked. The discussion had not occupied many minutes, and but little more than an hour had elapsed from the time the boats landed until two of them were again under way.

Even this might seem tardiness, considering the emergency, but probably no time was really lost by it, as the wet and exhausted men had stood in absolute need of rest, and they now bent to their oars with a strength and resolution which promised to make ample amends for the delay.

The oarsmen were all men who had been passengers on the lost vessel, not one of the crew or hands having volunteered to return, excepting the pilot of the steamboat, who now acted as helmsman for one of the boats, as Captain Chrome did for the other.

The sea was of course still very rough, but as the wind had almost ceased it could not long continue so, and there was a prospect of its subsiding by evening to a perfect calm.

The humane voyagers carried materials for torches to be used as signals if their search should be prolonged until after dark. They also had a revolver and some smaller pistols for a similar purpose, and they were provided with food and spirits to be used as restoratives for those whom they might pick up.

Much hope began to be entertained as they progressed, for hope always keeps pace with exertion—and they discussed with animation the probability of finding a considerable number alive.

As they conversed it was found, on inquiry, that five of the volunteer oarsmen had each left some friend or relative on the wreck for whom his solicitude was chiefly awakened.

One was a son, who was going in search of his father, and had manifested the greatest impatience at the delay in starting and wrath towards those who opposed the attempt.

His parent was nearly but unfortunately not quite sixty years old, and it was said by those who had witnessed the parting between the father and son that the latter had used every effort to induce his father to take his place in the boat and leave him upon the wreck.

Mr. Hare—such was the young man's name—did not speak of his father himself, except when questioned, then he replied, with much emotion:

"I ought to have stayed with him; that's what I ought to have done. If I had sworn that I would not go maybe he would have yielded. I shall never forgive myself if he is lost—never, and it will be of no use for me to live. I see him now as he stood there on the deck after we started, with his long white hair fluttering in the wind, and I hear his last words constantly, constantly."

"What were they?" asked one.

"He said, 'Go, Philip, go; I have only a few years of life left in any case, and you are a young man. Heaven bless you.' So I thought of my wife and children and went—but it was an awful mistake. I am sure that even they will despise me."

Argyle tried to comfort him.

"It's hard to tell what is exactly the right thing to do in such straits," he said. "Especially when they come upon us suddenly, and we haven't much time to decide. There were conflicting claims you see. Your father on the one side—your wife and children on the other. But you did what you thought right at the time, and what the old gentleman thought right or else he wouldn't have urged it."

"Yes—yes. Thank you, sir. I am glad to hear you say that."

"Some people accuse themselves too much, some not enough. I think you belong to the former class."

"Do you really think so?"

"I certainly do. Besides that, I do not believe he is lost. He had a life-preserver and four planks you say?"

"Yes, sir, and food."

"Ah, that's good. Oh, we'll find him, sir. Don't you be afraid."

Mr. Hare took courage and pulled at the oars with increased vigour.

It was of course impossible to judge with anything like accuracy of the place where the steamboat had sunk, but Captain Chrome was confident that they had come almost due west in approaching shore, and that by keeping as nearly an eastern course now as possible they could not fail to pass within telescopic view of any survivors of the wreck.

By five o'clock the subsiding waves had diminished to a gentle swell—the clouds dispersed and the sun's cheering beams fell upon the voyagers and illumined the waters far and near as if to aid in the search which these humane men had undertaken.

At six the captain and pilot felt certain that they must be drawing near the place where the steamer had gone down, and as there were yet more than two hours of daylight remaining all hearts were

elate with the hope of a successful issue to their labours.

The over-tasked men still worked vigorously with but brief intermissions, for there were no delays, excepting that the captain and pilot now and then took their turns at the oars, relinquishing the helms to the men whose places they filled.

But when seven o'clock came, and the great orb of day drew near the western horizon without having revealed to the anxious gazers any traces of the wreck upon the vast expanse of waters around them, their hopes gradually changed to something very near despair.

Yet no one admitted this. They laboured on, the captain diligently using the sea-glass and examining the surface of the sea in all directions.

"It won't be dark until half-past eight," said Argyle. "We have an hour and a half yet, and much may be done in that time. See, it is almost as calm as a mill-pond."

About half an hour later the disheartened rowers were thrilled by a shout from the captain announcing that he saw a large object floating about two miles north-east of them, and amid the greatest excitement the boats were immediately headed towards it.

"You'll see more soon, captain—you'll see more," said Argyle. "Look sharp."

But no—nothing else could be discovered, and with more apprehension than hope they proceeded, and became momentarily more sure that they were approaching some *débris* of the wreck.

"It looks like a table with the legs uppermost," said the captain, "and I think there is some one on it, but I can't make sure. I see no motion."

Others took the glass, and various conjectures were made, but the doubts were soon resolved. There was a man on the float, or the body of a man sitting nearly upright, but with head drooping and with one arm around one of the sticks or poles which projected upwards.

It did not seem to move, and a pistol was fired without attracting attention or causing any change in its position.

When, however, they were within half a mile of the little craft the figure upon it was distinctly seen to stir, changing the arm by which it held on to its support, but giving no signs of hearing either the shouts of the voyagers or the second pistol shot which was now fired to give notice of approaching aid.

It could now be seen that the float was a large circular table, bottom upwards, with some pieces of plank fastened across it to increase its bulk and buoyancy and keep it in position.

"Well, he's alive, that's certain," said Argyle;

"but I'm afraid it isn't Raleigh, for he had a settee; but we'll find him somewhere yet."

"Does he look like an old man?" asked Mr. Hare, anxiously.

"Can't see—it may be. He sits with his back towards us," replied the captain.

Others were equally anxious, each hoping that the person so near being rescued was a relative or friend.

Judge then of their disappointment when Captain Chrome, with his telescope still to his eye, announced first his belief, then his certainty, that it was a black man, and one of the waiters.

"Joe Congo we call him," he said. "He's been on the boat several years."

Still it was no little satisfaction to save his life, although no one was specially interested in his fate, and, besides, they would be enabled to learn from him the probable fate of the rest.

"A waiter, eh?" said Argyle. "Well, he has set his table to some purpose this time. Pull away, my boys; we'll have him on board in a few minutes. Hillo-a-a!"

But the man took no notice, and still sat with head drooping forward, seemingly looking into the water, in which position he continued until they were close alongside of him.

"Crazy, probably," said the captain. "They often become so from fright and exposure."

"Eshaw! He couldn't have been on there more than twelve hours; and a real nice little boat he has too," replied Argyle. "It's big enough for two. Ah, I see what is the matter."

"What is it?"

"There's a bottle lying under the plank there, dry and empty, I'll be bound. Hullo, Cuffy!"

"Cuffy yourself," said the man, gruffly, looking up with dull, fishy eyes. "What do you want? Keep off there. You'll run foul of me."

Suddenly aroused from his stupor, he did not at first comprehend his position, but he gradually awakened to a partial recognition of it, and, with some incoherent expressions of delight, suffered himself to be drawn into the captain's boat.

But he was too far gone in intoxication to retain more than a glimmer of reason, and while they vainly plied him with questions in regard to the lost steamer he persisted in leaning and reaching over the side of the boat towards the craft from which he had been rescued, muttering something which no one could understand.

"What is it, Congo? What do you want?" asked the captain.

"There's another man there—another man. Haul him in," said he, with thick voice.

"There's nobody there, Joe. Was any one on the table with you?"

"Another man. Haul him in!"

"But I tell you there is no one there!"

"Yes, sir; there is, sir. He's just gone down after something. He'll be up pretty soon. I've been watching for him ever so long."

Joe uttered these sentences with difficulty, then his head, which had been raised a little, dropped again, and he seemed relapsing into insensibility.

But some of the men dashed a handful of cold water on his face and neck and again aroused him.

"Jemmy! how the waves roll!" he said, then, for the first time recognising the captain's familiar voice—for that officer had continued to question him—he asked "Is that you, captain?"

"Yes, yes—wake up, Joe."

"Yes, sir; coming, sir."

"Where are the rest of the people that we left with you on the steamboat?"

"All gone, sir."

"When did the boat sink?" asked another.

"The day before yesterday morning, sir."

"How far from here? In what direction?" others asked.

"About a hundred and fifty miles, off that way," said Joe, pointing with both hands in opposite directions.

"Pull away, my boys, pull away!" said the captain. "It's folly to waste another minute questioning him. We may find others yet."

Refreshed by their brief respite the men bent to their oars and resumed their row eastward, while the captain again took up his telescope and carefully explored the surrounding waste of waters in all directions.

Some of the oarsmen without intermitting their labours continued to talk to Congo, who sat in the after part of the captain's boat, on the bottom, with his head resting against the "gunnel," and they occasionally dashed some water over him with the view of sobering him sufficiently to obtain some information from him, for they thought that little reliance could be placed on what he had told them about the loss of all his late companions. Certainly they hoped that it was unreliable.

It surely did not seem probable that this intoxicated man was the only survivor of the wreck on which there were so many strong and sober people all as well provided as he with floats, and most

of them having life-preservers too, which he had not.

They might indeed be all gone, as he had said, but it seemed more probable that many of them were yet alive, separated far from him and from each other, and the rescuing party unanimously resolved not only to continue their search until it was quite dark, but to remain out all night and renew their explorations at daylight.

The sea was calm; the summer night would be short, and their torch signals could be seen farther in the darkness than either shouts or shots could be heard, and might convey hope to many a despairing heart.

Little as they had accomplished they had yet the great satisfaction of knowing that they had not missed their way, and that they were somewhere in the vicinity of the sunken steamer. Where one survivor of the wreck had been found others might reasonably be looked for.

CHAPTER X.

A sail in sight appears.
We hail it with three cheers.

Congo unfortunately made no rapid approach to sobriety, and seemed desirous only to be allowed to sleep.

But this was not permitted him, for he was deluged from time to time by the oarsmen, who were all intent on obtaining farther intelligence from him.

"Easy, Joe," asked Mr. Hare, "what kind of a man was that on the table with you, eh?"

"Haul him in!" replied Joe, quickly—partly rising.

"No—no—Joe, it's too late now. We're far away from there; but what kind of a man was he? Hoy! Think now."

"He was a coloured gentleman, sir—like me. He was the cook, sir—off Bill—the captain knows him, sir. Haul him in!"

Greatly relieved, all interested could not help smiling now—and the sable man took the opportunity afforded by a cessation of questions to drop off again into a profound slumber.

Two hours afterwards he was awakened; some food was given to him which he ate voraciously, then he was again questioned in regard to what he had witnessed on that dreadful day.

He proved to be in a more rational state now, and answered with some coherence, though he was still far from being sober.

"Well, Congo, come, tell us all about it now," said the captain.

"Yes, sir."

"How long did the old 'Enterprize' float after the boats left her this morning?"

"This morning? Not this morning, captain; yesterday or day before—"

"No matter. How long was it after I left her before she went down?"

"Why, sir, I think it was four or five hours. I think it was almost noon before she went down."

"That's good—if it's true," said Argyle; "only eight or nine hours ago. We shall find some of them yet."

"No, you won't, sir—not a soul, sir. They are all gone—every one. I saw them."

"Were you on the vessel when she sank?"

"No, sir—not at all, sir. I'll tell you how it was, sir."

"Did you see it go under?" asked one, eagerly.

"Yes, sir. I was looking right at it. She hadn't settled very low—but she was rocking on the waves all that time, when all at once, sir, the bow lurched forward and pitched under, and down she went like a duck going after something. I almost thought the old thing was alive, sir. I felt mighty bad, sir; I almost cried. Yes, sir, to see the old boat on which I had waited at table for so many years go down like that. It was very affecting, sir."

"How long before this had you left her?"

"I was going to tell you. About an hour, sir. Me and the cook was about the first to put off, and we was floated away ever so far when she sank. We didn't dare to stay on board because we thought she'd go every minute."

"Well—did others leave her when you did?"

"Good many left about that time—more afterwards—and in an hour or so there was as much as thirty or forty people floating about in twos and threes—scattered all round, and some screaming awful, for the big waves rolled some of them over and over."

"Well, did the others stay on the boat till she went down?"

"No, sir! Not at all, sir—for when the sloop came—"

"The sloop! the sloop!" cried half a dozen voices. "What does he mean? What do you mean, Joe?"

"Why, the sloop that took them off. Can't you understand?"

A tumult of cheers, loud and prolonged, greeted this announcement, and young Hare, in his joyous excitement, threw his arms around the bewildered man, exclaiming:

"Why didn't you tell us this before, you dear old ace of spades?" and again he led off a new round of cheers, in which everybody heartily joined.

"Why didn't I tell you before?" replied Joe. "Why, I thought I did. I thought you knew that. We all knew that."

"Well, how was it? And why did not the sloop take you?"

"That's just it, sir—that's just what I was coming to, if you'll hold your noise and stop slapping me on the back," replied the ex-waiter, grinning good-naturedly.

"Well?"

"Well, you see, when the mist cleared up we saw a sloop all at once, about two or three miles off, just as if she had dropped from the clouds, and the folks on the steamboat saw her first, and they shouted and hurried like you did just now, and threw up their caps, and fired off pistols and waved flags, and acted like mad, sir."

"Yes—I daresay."

"Then we know that something must be the matter, me and cook, so we looked round and saw the sloop, and the people all round on the little rafts and boxes saw her, and they all hurried. Then me and cook felt so glad that we both took a pull at the brandy-bottle which Bill had got out of the lock-up closet that had got broken open somehow by the storm."

"I see," said the captain.

"There was plenty there, and Bill only took one bottle, which he said wasn't more than our share, and we were so wet, he said, it was good for our healths."

"Yes."

"But the sloop was a long time coming in its zig zag way, and by-and-bye we took another drink."

"Yes."

"And we felt so glad that pretty soon we took another, then another; and Bill said it was a pity to leave any, because they would take it away from us on the sloop, and divide it into little drams that wouldn't do anybody any good."

"So you drank again?"

"Yes, sir—several times, and once more, and again—then Bill said he'd take a drop more and lay down till the sloop came, for he was dreadful tired, and the waves made his head dizzy."

"Yes."

"But we kept drifting off the other way, and the sloop made for the wreck."

"Sloops! Why, there was only one sloop."

"Two, sir—two—after awhile—"

"After you had finished the brandy, I suppose."

"There was two sloops, sir, as sure as I'm a living sinner, close by each other, and close by the steamboat, which had become split in two by the waves. They stopped there awhile and then went round picking up the people on the rafts; but the air got so thick again I couldn't see plain, then there was only one sloop in sight, and just when I was expecting her to come my way she started off in the opposite direction."

"What did you do?"

"I thought never mind—the other one will come this way, surely; but she didn't, sir, and I'm blessed if I don't think she sunk, for I never saw her again."

"Well?"

"Well, I got frightened, and awoke Bill, and told him that the sloop had gone and left us, and he said: 'Get away and let me alone. I haven't anything to do with the sloop—I belong to the steamboat.' You see, sir, I think the liquor had affected him a little, but I didn't understand it then."

"I see."

"After that I got discouraged like, and I sat looking at the wreck for a long time, until she went down, as I told you. There was a little brandy left in the bottle, and I took that to comfort me—and I don't rightly remember what took place after that for a good while."

"I suppose not."

"I don't know whether it was that day, or the next, or the day before; but I was woke up by a splash, and I saw the cook's heels, with the red stockings on, going under the water. I thought he was diving for fun at first, but he didn't come back, sir. No, sir—I watched a long time and called to him, but he didn't come back."

"Had he no life-preserver?"

"No, sir—neither of us hadn't. The waiters didn't have any."

"Poor fellow! I am sorry for him. Have you anything more to tell?"

"No, sir. That's about all I expect. I was a sitting there looking for Bill to come back when you came up, and I was kind of confused like with the trouble."

"I see."

"And things were rather mixed up, you see, for I

thought I was a fishing out there; then when I saw the legs of the old table sticking up I remembered what was the matter, but I thought for a long time that yours were the sloop's boats come back after us. I can't think how I got so stupid, sir, but the sun had come out pretty hot, and maybe I was sunstruck."

The party had rested, and had eaten their supper, or lunch, by this time, and all became very merry in view of the good news they had heard.

No doubt was entertained that the Heaven-sent sloop had taken off all the people from the wreck, and had picked up all the stragglers upon the water except the negroes, and the happy voyagers resolved upon an immediate return to the land, for which they set out without farther delay.

There was some reason for haste, for the fine weather did not promise to last long; heavy clouds again rose in the west, which soon obscured the whole sky, and it became impossible, with neither sun nor stars to guide them, to keep anything near to a direct westward course. Nor could they tell in which direction they varied from it; but shoreward they were sure they were going, though they no longer hoped to effect a landing very near their friends.

Vainly they looked for land during the seemingly long night, and when daylight at length revealed a few miles distant it was quite unlike the shore they had left, and they coasted it for several hours in the hope of discovering the place where they had left their late companions.

Not succeeding in this, they landed, about nine o'clock in the morning, to rest, and to make their breakfast on the scanty remains of the food which they had taken with them, and of which there was enough left only to sharpen their appetites, not to satisfy them.

The shore was low and marshy, and although it was thickly wooded they had no means of procuring game, and they soon departed in search of a more hospitable region.

Nearly the whole day was spent in this quest, and late in the afternoon they again disembarked on a bolder shore in a prairie-like region, with little timber in view, yet with some elevated land in the background. Here they hoped to find some human habitation, and an hour's search by the scattered party resulted in the discovery of a cluster of Indian wigwams, nearly thirty in number, on the edge of a strip of woodland not far from the lake shore.

This was a doubtful advantage, for it was of course uncertain whether the savages would prove friendly or hostile; but it was argued that from their position the Indians must have seen the boats coasting their territory, and that if they were evil-disposed they would have already attacked the white men while they were separated from each other.

They drew together for consultation, and being impelled by extreme hunger—and, indeed, by the fear of starvation—they decided to apply to the red-men for food.

They would not go in a body, but would send one or two of their number, in order that their own pacific intentions might be understood, for they thought it not improbable that the warriors of the little village, at least equal in number to their wigwams, were in the wood, watching their movements.

"Let Joe go," said the pilot. "The Indians are very partial to coloured men, and—"

"Are they?" said Congo, who, when sober, had a penchant for big words. "Then their sentiments are not reciprocated, sir, they are not at all mutual, sir."

"Besides, if worst come to worst, he owes us a life."

"Yes, that is a fact, Mr. Case, but nobody pays debts now-a-days, sir. The gentlemen are all failing, sir, and going into insolvency, and I don't think I can pay more than three per cent. on that debt, sir."

"Very good, Joe," said the captain, "but suppose we should raise a purse for you of fifty pounds, how then?"

"Well, sir, that is another point of view. I'll think of it a little. Maybe there is nobody there. Then you'll give it to me all the same?"

"Certainly."

"Maybe they'll capture me, and make me hunt and fish for them, and cook, and wash dishes. Then you'll give the money to Sarah?"

"Certainly."

"And some day I'll get up early and run away. But maybe they'll kill me."

"I don't believe they would, Joe."

"Nor I too—not if I go polite, sir. But if they should, then my wife—"

"She shall have the money—oh, yes."

"I'll do it, sir. Jemmy, but I will! A whole fifty pounds earned in half an hour! It's more than I could save in three years. I never saved anything yet. I ain't afraid. I've seen Indians before now. I'll go."

The money was at once raised and put into the

captain's hands, and Joe, having inspected it to make sure that all was right, prepared for immediate departure.

He received some instructions as to how he was to act, what he was to say if he could make the red-men understand his language, and what gestures he was to use if they could not. No weapon was allowed him lest he should make indiscreet use of it and precipitate ruin upon the whole party. In fact there were no weapons in the company except one clumsy five-barrelled revolver—the revolver of to-day was unknown then—and three small pistols.

"Be sure to tell them that we are all well armed," said the captain, smiling; "but that we are good men, and do not want to harm them or even to frighten them. Tell them we want nothing but food, and we will pay for that, then we'll go right away."

They gave him some money in silver, and told him to give that to the Indians and to promise them as much more as soon as the provisions were sent.

"Be discreet, Joe, now, for everything depends on that."

"I will, sir; I'll be very discreet."

"Whatever happens, don't get angry. When you get near them stop and lay your hand on your heart—so—and point to the sky."

Joe, in attempting to imitate the gesture of his instructor, put his hand on a region a great deal lower than his heart, and one that might be considered the more immediate seat of suffering from his prolonged fasting.

This error being corrected he was permitted to depart, and he set out with perfect confidence and with no small sense of the dignity of his mission.

The huts were about a mile distant, and he walked rapidly at first but with more deliberation when he got within ordinary rifle-shot of the settlement. From this point he proceeded warily and with great vigilance, soliloquising as he went, but fearing that he might be overheard, he was very chary of his language.

"If the fiends—gentlemen I mean—are going to fire I wish to gracious they'd do it now," he said, "before I get any closer and while there's time to run. I can't see nothing moving over there."

At a quarter of a mile from the village he stopped and bowed very low, cap in hand, and he repeated this performance every few rods as he proceeded, varying it at times by smiting his heart and pointing upwards.

Still he saw nobody, and although he believed the Indians were hiding, near to or in their houses, he went forward, though with much trepidation, repeating, in the intervals between his obeisances, the only prayer he could recall to memory—beginning "Now I lay me down to sleep."

At the edge of the wood, and not a dozen yards from the nearest wigwam, he stopped, and after peering carefully around in all directions he called out:

"Is any of the gentlemen or ladies at home?"

Receiving no answer to this polite inquiry, he advanced near enough to one of the huts to look through an opening, which served for a window, and to obtain a view of the interior.

A glance showed him that no one was within, and he ventured to push aside the door or curtain of skin which hung before the entrance and walk in.

The building, if such it may be called, was conical or tent-like in shape, entirely made of saplings, and boughs and bushes curiously intertwined and partly covered with skins.

A bed of the same materials was in one corner of the lodge on the bare earth, and a large log, hewn smooth on one side, served the purpose of a bench or settee.

A few cooking utensils of stone and iron completed the furniture, but that there was nothing edible in the room the hungry man quickly ascertained. He went out, and entered another wigwam with a similar result; but here everything bore the marks of a hasty evacuation.

A fire was burning outside the hut, within a little circular wall of stone; an iron kettle and a large gourd of water stood beside it, and near the door a few ears of dried corn had been dropped, evidently in the haste of departure.

These Joe pocketed, then he continued his explorations, gaining courage as he proceeded, and scarcely fearing any longer that he should encounter a foe.

"They have all run away," he said, "and took their victuals with them. Let's try this here next one."

To his surprise the next lodge which he entered had an inmate—a very old and decrepit Indian, who seemed able neither to walk nor to stand, and his alarmed companions had evidently abandoned him to his fate. He was tall and gaunt, was dressed in a sort of tunic of dirty deer-skin, with bead-embroidered leggings, and moccasins of the same material; had heavy gold rings in his ears, a wampum belt

about his waist, and an eagle-feather fastened in his scalp-lock.

He was seated on a pile of skins, chanting in a low voice, and he had probably decorated himself for the "happy despatch" which he anticipated receiving at the hand of his visitor.

"Good morning, sir—servant, sir," said Congo, bowing and scraping as he caught sight of this strange individual. "Hope you're quite well?"

The Indian bent his head a little lower, as if for the expected blow, and continued to sing.

"Never mind the music now," said Joe; "I am in a hurry. Where's all your folks?"

The old warrior looked up, and, seeing that his visitor was unarmed and was making pacific demonstrations, he gazed at and listened to him for some seconds in silence and amazement.

"Do you talk English?" continued Joe, who seemed to think that he would make himself more easily understood by this mode of speech.

The chief, for such he was, or had been in his better days, nodded emphatically, as if he would have said:

"Yes, you have come to the right shop for English, my boy."

What he did say was:

"Ees, me spokes him. Me Saginaw, ugh! Wise chief!"

"Glad you mentioned it, sir. Happy to make your acquaintance. Where is your folks?"

The Indian shook his head.

"Don't you understand?" asked Joe.

Again the chief made a negative gesture.

"Where's all the Indians, and the squaws, and the papooses?" continued the man, looking around the room.

"My braves hunt. Squaws and papooses much scare—and run."

"In the woods?" asked Joe, pointing that way.

The chief seemed disposed to be uncommunicative on this point, and his visitor repeated the question.

"Um sink in the ground," repeated the Saginaw, gravely, pointing downwards.

"Did they?" said Joe, with a wondering stare; then, after a pause, continued, "Tell you what, old chap, I'm very hungry."

He opened his huge mouth and pointed into it, by way of explaining this remark.

"There's ten men back there, all very hungry—good men, understand."

"Good!" said the chief, echoing the word used by his guest.

"Yes—good men—all armed with rifles and revolvers and knives, understand?"

"Rifles! knives! ugh!" repeated the Indian.

"Exactly. You understand. Now have you got any victuals to sell?"

The chief looked steadily at him, awhile, then shook his head in evident bewilderment, and Joe, taking out a handful of silver coin, laid it down beside him and asked him if he knew what it was.

"Ees," was the reply; "me Saginaw wise chief. Know em."

Without more ado he took up the money and slipped it piece by piece inside his belt.

"All right," said Joe. "Now where's the victuals?"

"Ah! No understand English."

"The victuals!" screamed Joe again, pointing down his widely opened mouth.

"No understand."

"Corn, venison, bear's meat—anything to eat?" continued the pertinacious Joe, pantomiming mastication by snapping his great white teeth together like a hungry mastiff.

"Ah, ah, phuff—ees! Buckle, tackle, gon so ripta, honourable much tosh-a-tong! Ugh, ugh!" said the chief, smiling with a sudden gleam of intelligence, and trying to rise.

"That's it!" replied Joe; "you've got it now, I feel sure, though I can't say I quite understand you."

"Listen, my son!" said the chief, sinking back upon the skins from which he had partly risen. "Me great chief."

"Yes. You told me that before."

"Me much old."

"I thought that too."

"Me seen thousand moons."

"Thunder!" exclaimed Congo; "that must have made it very light!"

"Now great chief going to the happy hunting-grounds."

"Are you though? If you'll lend me a rifle I'll go too."

"Listen! My son wants meat?"

"Yes—very much."

The Saginaw took out one of the silver pieces from his belt, and held it up in one hand while he extended the other towards his visitor.

"More!" he said.

"Oh, that's your game, is it, you avaricious old carmadgeon—thanks to goodness, he can't understand that," said the man, laughing and taking out another handful of silver.

"No, you don't!" he continued as the sachem offered to take it—"not if this child knows himself."

"Money," said the Indian, still reaching out his hand.

"Corn and meat," replied Joe.

"Money."

"The victuals first."

The Indian smiled now, and rising with difficulty stood shaking a moment, then pointed to the skins on which he had been sitting.

"I see," said Joe; "but we can't eat them."

The chief motioned to the man to push them aside, and when he had done so an opening was discovered in the ground about three feet by two, and apparently of considerable depth.

In this little cellar was the unskinned carcass of a deer, which had evidently been recently killed, and had probably been thrown in there in haste when the alarm of invasion had been given.

Joe's mouth watered at the sight, and he took hold of a leg of the venison to lift it out, but the old man shook his head and growled a refusal.

He had only showed his wares with a view of eliciting a larger offer of pay.

"I will have it, Mr. Chief," said the man, jerking the carcass out, "or at least half of it. How much for half?"

The Indian showed a silver coin, then held up ten fingers.

"All right," replied Joe, counting down three or four pieces; but the chief knew that he had not got his price, and all attempts at expostulation were responded to only by a puzzled look and by renewed shakings of the head.

"But I haven't got any more," said Joe.

"Ess—more—more. Me wise chief."

"It's my private opinion that you are an old rip," replied Joe, smiling and turning his pockets wrong-side out, by which means he succeeded in finding one more, which he put into the extended hand of his companion.

"See—all gone."

Pending the controversy the old man tottered to the window and looked out, but his visitor supposed it was only in apprehension of the approach of the white men, and continued his negotiations.

"They shan't hurt you," he said. "Don't be afraid. All good men. Just give me a hatchet, if you please, captain, to cut this in two."

"No understand."

"Little axe—papoose axe—oh? understand?" continued Joe, making strange signs by way of elucidation.

The Indian shook his head.

"You are dreadful dumb! Haven't you got a little tomahawk?"

A distant shout was heard at this moment, and Joe, looking out of the door, saw about thirty armed Indians and half a dozen large dogs scarcely a quarter of a mile distant approaching the settlement.

The red-men were sauntering lazily, and several bore heavy back loads of game, while others were singing and cutting antics like merry men after a successful chase.

Not a little alarmed, but guessing that it would be useless, nay, most dangerous, to run before so many weapons and dogs—Congo retreated into the cabin.

"Are they your people?" he asked, holding the skin curtain aside, that the old man might see out.

"Ess. My young men. Me great chief."

"Yes, sir—that you are! You're a good man too. You will not let them hurt me, eh?"

Joe shook hands with the chief and smote his breast, and made all manner of pacific demonstrations while he said this.

"No understand."

"Oh—the dence you don't. You grow dumb just when it suits you, I think. And they look like mighty ugly customers."

So saying, he tumbled the dead deer back into the hole and drew the pile of skins over it, fearing that he might otherwise be suspected of being a robber, and be slain before any explanation could be made.

Partly by urging, and partly by force, he induced the "wise chief" to resume his seat and again tried to make him understand that he wanted his protection from the coming warriors.

"Do they speak English?" he asked, anxiously.

"Ess—Derte-jap—he speaks 'em—great much."

"Dirty-chap, eh? That's a curious name. Is he a chief?"

"Young chief. Me old. Wise man."

"I see. You've been laid on the shelf a good while, and ain't of near as much consequence as you make yourself out. Is Dirty-chap a good man?"

"Ess—good! Got much scalps."

"Jemmy! I hope he's got enough! There they come now close by; I hear them. I wish I was back on the raft or anywhere else but here."

Peeping out, he saw that the hunters had been joined by a rabble of squaws and children, who had rushed out of their hiding-places in the woods to meet them, and that the whole party, babbling loudly, were within a few rods of the settlement.

"Now for it," said Joe, with great trepidation. "Stand by me, old gentleman, or I'm a dead man. 'Now I lay me down to sleep.' Oh, jimminy! how stupid I was to come here and get into such a scrape as this. They look as fierce as wild wolves, and them old squaws are telling them all manner of falsehoods about me. I know they are. They'll certainly make mince meat of me as soon as they find me."

The red-men were certainly in considerable excitement.

Some had stopped and were looking earnestly at the distant party of whites which had been pointed out to them by the women, and others were advancing warily towards the wigwam of the old chief, for vigilant eyes from the brakes and bushes in the wood had watched Joe's arrival in the village, and his entrance into the several lodges, and that he had not departed from that one was well known to them.

(To be continued.)

THE MYSTIC EYE OF HEATHCOTE.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE Spanish captain, with the wicked smile and handsome teeth, who commanded the "Armado," turned a deaf ear to all Margaret Seaton's entreaties to be returned to English soil, for the fact was the "Armado" was on the watch day and night to keep clear of English crafts, and her captain was not to be expected to peril his own safety in order to gratify the whim of a woman.

"Let her make herself useful in the mess-room," he said to his mate, "and we'll drop her off at the first good chance. She ought to be content that we've saved her life."

So, day by day and night after night, the "Armado" sped on, leaving the English hills farther and yet farther behind. Margaret Seaton performed in uncomplaining silence the tasks assigned her, gaining renewed strength every hour, but growing hopeless as she was borne far away from her native shore; yet she determined to submit patiently to whatever came, like the heroic woman she was.

Despite her iron resolve, when in the starry night-watches she dreamed of England, of her little pet, golden-haired Gracie, of Heathcote Abbey, and that wondrous old opal, blinking in fadeless splendour in its dark hiding-place—of all the bitter wrongs that only her hand could right—her stern gray eyes grew wet with tears, and a passionate yearning tore her brave heart.

Still the "Armado" sped on, and poor, good Margaret grew harder and more hopeless, little dreaming that the power she called a cruel, inexorable fate was leading her through peril and mystery to the full accomplishment of the great work entrusted to her hands.

The "Armado" was a swift craft, and in a few weeks she was away out on the Indian waters, flying along like a solitary bird, and avoiding all contact with other vessels.

One morning, when the waters glittered beneath the glory of a cloudless sun, the Spanish captain espied an English war-ship bearing steadily down upon him. He changed his course upon the instant and put the "Armado" upon her best speed. Still the war-ship gained upon them, and so rapidly that by noon Margaret Seaton, watching furtively from an unseen corner, could see the red pennon of St. George streaming from the mast-head.

The sight stirred her heart like a bugle-call, and brought the swift tears to her eyes. Was the hour of her deliverance at hand?

Before the afternoon closed the ringing hail-call of "Brig ahoy!" had awakened a thousand pealing echoes on the "Armado's" deck; but the Spanish captain gave no heed or answer. On he went, skimming the billows like a swallow, and when the sunset burned out, and the great tropic moon soared up he seemed to be gaining ground, and the red pennon of the English ship faded like a speck in the distance.

Margaret Seaton crept down to the cabin with an aching heart. But at midnight a hoarse cry aroused her, and as she rushed towards the deck she was almost stifled with smoke. The "Armado" was on fire! The captain was doing his utmost to preserve order and keep his men at the pumps, but the wildest excitement soon prevailed, while the flames spread with appalling rapidity. Very soon, despite the captain's angry protestations, a signal gun was fired, and the war-ship put out her life-boats to rescue the hapless crew.

Margaret Seaton stood on deck, with the flames leaping and roaring around her like mad beasts of prey. In one of the approaching boats a young man, wearing the uniform of a lieutenant, stood erect. Margaret could see him distinctly, as his boat neared the burning brig, a tall, stalwart young fellow, with a haughty, Saxon face, and a profusion of curling blonde hair, blown about by the

breeze; and something in his handsome face awoke a strange thrill in her heart.

He swept the blazing deck with his fearless glance, and the solitary woman's figure instantly caught his attention.

"Good Heaven! there's a woman on board!" he ejaculated, and the next instant he had leaped on the burning deck and stood at her side.

"Come!" he commanded, grasping her arm; "there's not one instant to lose!"

But even in that moment of supreme peril Margaret paused to gaze into his face, a face so thrillingly familiar.

"Who are you?" she gasped, with white, unsteady lips.

"What does that signify?" thundered the young officer, dragging her roughly after him; "don't you see the boat is about to leave? Another moment and you are lost."

Still she peered into his face.

"Answer me," she said, hoarsely; "are you Carlos Brignoli?"

"Yes—that's my name," cried the young man, half frantic with anger. "Good heavens, woman, are you mad?"

"No, not mad," she answered, solemnly, "and never fear, my boy, we shall not be lost. I am Margaret Seaton, and Heaven has led me through worse perils than this to find you, and save you, and do you justice at last!"

Half an hour later, when the smuggler captain and his crew were snugly disposed of aboard the British war-ship, Margaret Seaton and the young officer sat together in the captain's cabin. The story she told him was a long one, and wondrous strange. At the end the young man bounded to his feet, his handsome face aglow with exultation.

"Oh, Aunt Margaret!" he cried, passionately, "are you sure you are telling me the truth? It cannot be; it will surely all turn out a dream in the end!"

"I am telling you the truth," she answered, steadily; "the truth that should have been revealed years ago."

He struck his hands together with a cry of boyish triumph.

"And to-morrow would have been too late," he said; "to-morrow I was to be transferred to the Indian service, never to set foot on English soil again. And that this news should come to me, after all my shame and humiliation. But," he added, suddenly, a spasm of agony distorting his face, "I had forgotten. What does it matter since she is dead?"

"Who's dead?" questioned Margaret, sharply.

"Lady Grace," he replied, mournfully; "she's dead!"

"Who says so? Who says my darling's dead? Who tells such a falsehood?" continued poor Margaret, fiercely, her face whitening with despair.

"It is no falsehood," continued the young officer, his eyes full of inexpressible grief. "I stood by her grave when I was in England."

"They killed her, my poor little bird!" gasped Margaret, "and after all I'm too late!"

"Too late!" echoed her companion, turning disconsolately away—"what need I to care now?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ON the very day that Carlos Brignoli and Margaret Seaton landed at Liverpool Hendrick Seaton came up to London. He could not rest an hour while the sister whom he loved with all the force of his rugged nature was unavenged. Living or dead he would learn her fate, and punish her enemies, if it took him his life-time. Accordingly, leaving Lady Grace at the old farmhouse, under the protection of his sister, he came up to London accompanied by his faithful ally, pretty Janet.

He was a keen, shrewd man, despite his sluggish look and uncouth ways, and would have been nearer his proper element in Scotland Yard than at a cobbler's bench. He was well posted in London affairs and localities, and, knowing that Lady Heathcote and her clique would be settling themselves in their winter quarters preparatory to the commencement of the London season, he went up to the Heathcote mansion, which stood in the vicinity of St. James's Square, to make a reconnaissance. But to his inexpressible disappointment he found the mansion closed, and learned that Lady Heathcote and her newly wedded husband had gone for the winter to Rome.

But Janet would not hear of going back to Cornwall, and in compliance with her suggestion they set out for Heathcote Abbey, to linger in that vicinity for a time and see if anything could be found out.

"Tis our only chance, uncle," she argued, "and there's no telling what may happen. I'll get the situation of parlour-maid at one of the grand places," she continued, with a curl of her pretty, cherry lips, "and if there are any secrets I'll be sure to find them out, and at the same time we may be able to do something for Lady Grace."

So the cobbler consented to her plan, and on a chilly December afternoon they took the train for Yorkshire.

The carriages were all crowded, and Janet was forced to accept a very narrow seat, offered her by a handsome young gentleman, who placed his luggage on his knees in order to make room for her.

The train sped on, leaving smoky London far behind in the gloomy distance. As the afternoon closed the clouds thickened, and the chilly mist changed into a storm of rattling sleet, with a wild, sobbing wind which at intervals swelled into a roaring gust. The cobbler, after one sharp survey of his fellow passengers, settled his huge limbs for a comfortable sleep, while Janet pressed her rosy face against the window, and, gazing out on the wild hills and desolate moorlands, drenched in the dismal rain, fell to dreaming of all that the future held in store for them.

Lady Grace's strange story had aroused all her young and glowing fancies, and in connection with the efforts she was to put forth in regard to her aunt she wore many a golden romance and thrilling love dream for herself. For Janet was as bright in mind as she was beautiful in person; her imagination was vivid, her affections warm and quick, and all her aspirations were far above the station she occupied.

A gentle voice, and a soft touch on her arm, recalled her to her senses.

"Allow me, madam," and the handsome gentleman unfolded his travelling-shawl, and wrapped it over her shoulders.

Janet glanced sharply into the handsome, high-bred face, then her own flushed, and she murmured her thanks in a shy and embarrassed manner that was irresistible, judging from the deepening glow of admiration in the young gentleman's eyes. After that they managed somehow to fall into conversation, and it turned out that the young man was going to Yorkshire too, and was no other person than Lord Clarence Glandore, the young heir of Glandore Court, and the disappointed lover of the ill-fated Lady Beatrice.

Simple little Janet heard this with something like a thrill of terror, and shot curious girlish glances from beneath her dark lashes at the man whose name she had so often heard in connection with the terrible story of the Italian countess. But he was merely a genial, high-bred young nobleman, and seemed to have pretty well overcome whatever grief the falseness of his affianced may have caused him. As the dreary afternoon wore by, and the rattling storm without increased, the two grew to be quite friendly, and when the train stopped for a short time at one of the stations, his lordship went out and obtained a sandwich and a cup of tea for his companion.

Janet accepted the refreshments with flushing cheeks. It was no small matter to a girl like her to receive such delicate attention from a young peer, and being a thoroughly honest girl, while it flattered her vanity, it hurt her pride. So she swallowed her tea, and, having given utterance to her thanks, withdrew to the rayless window, and maintained a discreet silence. Whereupon his lordship sought consolation in the pages of a book.

Through the bitter winter night the train sped on. Listening to the moaning wind and lulled by the flying motion, Janet was just lapsing into a light dream, when all at once there came a terrific shock, a mad, leaping plunge, and a crash as if heaven and earth had come together. Then all was blackness.

A sharp, stinging pain restored her to consciousness. She was lying on the ground, with the sharp hail beating on her face, and across her breast a heavy timber lay, crushing the very breath out of her. After a moment she made an effort to sit up, but she found her right arm helpless, and the beam apparently immovable.

At this moment a piteous moan fell on her ear, and, turning her head, by the feeble light she saw two or three figures buried beneath the shattered timbers. One of these was moving feebly, and holding up a shapely hand on which a costly diamond burned. Janet caught the glitter of the jewel, and a wild thrill stirred her heart. By an almost superhuman effort she threw off the beam that held her down, and endeavored to arise. The pain in her arm made her deadly faint, but she staggered to her feet, and reached the spot where the moaning sufferer lay. There was no help at hand, and she bent over him, over the handsome, fair face of her travelling companion. He was gasping piteously for breath, and clutched frantically at the splintered timbers buried in his bleeding chest. Across him, and holding down his arms with a mountain weight, lay the body of a dead man. Janet, forgetful of her own injuries, bent down, and put her soft little hands on the blonde head.

"I think I can help you," she said; "are you suffering so much?"

The tender voice reached the young nobleman's ear; he opened his eyes, and at sight of the sweet

face above him, despite the horrible agony of his situation, he smiled. It seemed to him, almost lapsing as he was into the eternal unconsciousness of death, the face of one of Heaven's angels.

Seeing the smile, Janet took courage. She looked about her for help, but no one was near. She could see men and women running to and fro, in the valley below, and hear the voices of persons hurrying up from the village, but no one answered her frantic call for succour. And there at her feet the man who had treated her so kindly lay, in the very agonies of death. One moment later, and all help might be needless.

She bent down resolutely, and began to heave at the lead-like body of the dead man with all her young might. The effort whitened her face and brought the blood from her crushed arm, but she did not flinch from the pain, and after two or three attempts the rigid body rolled over.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Janet, but even while she uttered the words she reeled back faint and dizzy.

"Oh, don't," gasped Lord Glandore, making an ineffectual effort to free his lacerated chest; "don't, my good girl, you are killing yourself."

But Janet took no heed. She came of a resolute race, and the strongest man among them had never been braver than she, girl that she was. Shaking off the deadly faintness by the power of her strong will, she knelt down by the suffering man and began to work at the shattered timbers that pierced and crushed his chest.

Utterly careless of her own pain she contrived to get her tender arms under them, then she raised them cautiously and gently, though great beads of perspiration stood out on her brow.

The young lord, who thought he was dying, watched her, this girl who was suffering so much to save him, and his bearded lips trembled like a woman's. Presently he felt a tearing wrench, then the deadly weight was lifted, and went over with a crash. But his young deliverer went with it, and when he struggled to a sitting posture, drawing a long, deep breath of relief, he saw her lying on the drenched grass, the bitter winter sleet beating on her white face.

"She's dead!" he gasped, "and for my sake. Oh, my brave darling!"

Bounding to his feet, under the sudden impulse that stirred him, he rushed forward to raise her up. But before he reached where she lay the blood gushed from his side in a purple torrent and he fell fainting to the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It was Christmas Eve, and Mrs. Telfer was in the roomy kitchen at the "Heathcote Arms," up to the elbows in holiday preparations.

"Such a mortal as Telfer is," she said, pausing a moment to pour out a mug of warm liquor for the Cornish cobbler, who was very cosily established in one corner of the ample fire-place; "he never knows when he has got enough. Here was two great turkeys and a brace of ducks, besides no end of pullets, and here he comes this morning a lugger home—a pair of geese. Such a man for victuals, and when it's set on the table he don't eat much, goodness knows, as I tell him. Still he's never got enough. And I am always run off my feet with cooking. Here, Janet, mix this dressing for me, I want to get these fowls out of the way, then we'll hurry with the pies."

Janet came round from the opposite side of the dresser, where she was moulding cream-cakes, her cheeks a trifle pale in consequence of her recent injuries. She occupied the very comfortable situation of parlour-maid at the "Heathcote Arms," and in the few weeks of her stay she had become a primo favourite with its genial-hearted hostess.

"That's a spry lass," said Mrs. Telfer as Janet chopped and mixed the pungent seasoning; "she's such help at a time like this Heaven knows what I should have done if she hadn't come. 'Tis an ill wind that blows no one good they say; and, as I was a telling Telfer, that railroad accident, dreadful as it was, brought good luck to me, Mr. Hendrick."

On the night of that terrible collision he had escaped unhurt, and had brought Janet, who was pretty badly injured, down to the Telfer tavern, and engaged to pay her expenses till the poor thing was able to do for herself. Not that she was aught to him, for it had been a preconcerted plan that he and Janet were to meet as total strangers.

Meantime he engaged board and lodging for himself, and set up his inevitable cobbler's stall out on the Heathcote high road. And when Janet recovered, and accepted Mrs. Telfer's offer, he still remained.

On this stormy Christmas Eve he sat in his comfortable corner, sipping his warm beverage, while Janet flitted about, performing her homely duties with a deft and graceful hand that transformed everything in the old-fashioned kitchen.

Presently the landlord entered, stamping the snow from his heavy boots.

"A bitter night we're going to have, comrade," he

said, addressing the cobbler; "the snow thickens every minute, and the wind's like a knife. Hey, wife, it smells like Christmas in here. Janet, lass, can't you give me something warm to drink? I am chilled to the bone."

"And serve you right," snapped Mrs. Telfer; "what are you going about for in such weather as this—a man who has a hot fire and plenty of victuals at home?"

"Easy now, old woman; you can't look for a man to hang in the chimney corner all the time like a smoking herring; I run round by Overbury's to invite him down to-morrow, then I dropped in at Jobson's. Colonel Hernshawe has just got home. I saw him galloping up to the Abbey just as I turned into the lane, and the old place is all ablaze—I suppose they'll have a grand Christmas among them."

"Yes, the great folks have been coming for the last week or two," put in Mrs. Telfer. "Mrs. Chadwick was here yesterday, and she says the Abbey's packed full. But she seemed terribly put out because they came racing back when no one looked for them—'twas the colonel's fault. Lady Heathcote—or Hernshawe now I suppose—was set on staying till spring, but the Indian soldier took it in his head to come, and come he did. He'll lead the grand lady a fine life from what Chadwick says; and no matter if he does. I hope they'll see the ghost again at the Christmas dinner, that I do."

"Now, wife," put in the landlord, "what's the good of wishing them evil?"

"To pay them off for their evil works," retorted his dame, facing him defiantly, with her plump arms set akimbo; "look at that little grave down yonder, with the marble stone over the head of her as was such a sweet lass; and they drove her from home, and broke her heart, and seized upon all her wealth; and call poor Margaret Seaton to mind—if ever a woman was put out of the way she was. Don't talk to me, Telfer—it makes my blood boil to think of them. But you see, sir," she added, deprecatingly, "folks like us are afraid to say much."

The cobbler nodded stolidly, but his yellow eyes glittered as he dropped his chin in his broad palm and puffed away at his pipe.

"Overbury's been telling me an uncommon strange thing," said the landlord, lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper; "so strange that I can't begin to believe it."

Mrs. Telfer dropped the pie she was crimping and crossed to her husband's side.

"Now, Telfer," she entreated, pantingly, "do tell us what it is—speak out, man."

But Telfer shook his head.

"I don't know as it would be right," he replied; "but I just tell you it scared me when Overbury told me. He got wind of it up at the rectory."

Mrs. Telfer laid her stout arm across her husband's shoulder, and bent her florid face affectionately towards his.

"Now, Telfer," she whispered, coaxingly, "have we been man and wife for twenty years and never had a secret betwixt us, and be you the first one to begin now?"

The landlord was conquered.

"You see how it is, Mr. Hendrick," he cried out, addressing the cobbler by the name he bore at Heathcote: "you see how she conquers me. No, wife, no, I don't mean to have a secret from you; and, knowing as I do as Mr. Hendrick be a close-mouthed man, and Janet a discreet lass, I'll spak out, and be done with it. This is what Overbury said—as there is a rumour abroad that Lady Grace is not dead, and that somebody else is buried up yonder under the marble stone."

Mrs. Telfer uttered a sharp cry, and Janet and the cobbler exchanged glances.

"But, Telfer," panted his wife, at last, "how could it be? Didn't we see her buried with our own eyes?"

"True enough, but we didn't see her die," replied the landlord, shrewdly. "It may be so, and it may not—anyhow it's out, and old Vant's on the track of the truth; and Overbury did say," he continued, lowering his voice, "that my lady and the colonel are very uneasy."

"Well, well," sighed Mrs. Telfer, sinking into a chair, "did any mortal ever hear the like of that?—and the child's name on the marble stone, too! Well, I declare! no wonder the ghosts haunt them. Mercy! what's that?"

It was a double rap at the inn door, which the landlord answered with alacrity.

A young man entered, a handsome, well-built fellow, buttoned to the throat in a gray overcoat. He had fine blue eyes and a profusion of jet-black, curling hair.

"I want a cup of strong coffee, landlord," he said as he seated himself in the chimney corner, "and a bit of meat and bread. We are having bitter weather for Christmas."

"Bitter weather indeed, stranger," replied the landlord. "I never felt a keener wind, and the snow will be knee-deep by morning if it holds on. Come, wife, bustle about—the stranger is hungry, I daresay."

Mrs. Telfer set the coffee to boil, while Janet sliced cold beef, and brought out the remnant of a game pie. In a very short time the young man sat down to a tempting repast.

He eat heartily, asking a number of questions in the meantime in regard to Heathcote Abbey and its inmates; and when, at the end of an hour, he took his departure he left his hostess in a perfect fever of curiosity and excitement.

"I tell you, Telfer, I've seen him before," she cried, standing in the centre of the room, with her arms akimbo, "just as sure as I see you, I've seen him before, and who is he?"

The landlord shook his head.

"You are too sharp for me, wife," he said, "some fine chap on his way to the Abbey maybe, he seemed curious about the folks up there."

"Well, well," continued his wife, shaking her head wisely from side to side, "it's my opinion that he is here for some special purpose—it struck me the moment I set eyes on him—what do you say, Mr. Hendrick?"

But the cobbler declined to express an opinion, and, gulping down the remains of his beverage, he buttoned up his coat and sallied out into the stormy darkness.

Janet, who was removing the dishes, followed him to the inn door. He turned and laid his heavy hand on her arm.

"Keep your eyes open, lass," he whispered, "there is something on foot more than common, if I don't mistake—I am going to see what that youngster is up to."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FROM the "Heathcote Arms" the young stranger made his way towards the little rustic lodge that stood at the great gate of the old Abbey, and with stealthy steps the Cornish cobbler followed him. The ivy-mantled towers were all draped with snow, and there was no sign of life visible, save in the wreaths of blue smoke that curled upwards from the towering chimneys.

The young man knocked for admittance, and was met by a servant-maid, who informed him that the lodgekeeper was out, and conducted him into a pleasant little sitting-room to await his return. The stranger sat down before the glowing fire and fell into a profound reverie, from which the sound of voices in the adjoining apartment presently aroused him. Two women were drinking tea together, as he could see through the half-open door, and enjoying in the meantime a choice bit of gossip.

"I tell you what it is, Mrs. Jobson," said the stout housekeeper of the Abbey, "what with this, and what with the other, I am clear beat out. The Abbey's packed full of fine ladies and gentlemen from London, and there's a French cook in the kitchen, and a French maid for every room in the house—all my lady's work; and the colonel's going on like mad, and saying the Heathcote fortune won't hold out a year. But my lady takes no notice, she just goes on like a queen in her silks and jewels, with her cheeks like fire, and those great eyes of hers blazing—there, Mrs. Jobson, it makes me shiver to look at her. Betwixt you and me, she's got something more than common on her conscience. She's not forgotten the master's death yet, and she tries to drown it in company and pleasure."

Mrs. Jobson gave her shoulders a significant shrug.

"There is something worse than that to worry her, if you only knowed, Mrs. Chudleigh," she said, with importance.

Mrs. Chudleigh set down her cup and opened her eyes wide.

"Have you heard anything new, Mrs. Jobson?" she inquired, alertly.

The lodgekeeper's wife nodded and chuckled, evidently enjoying her advantage over her superior, the stately housekeeper.

"Jobson hears a great deal," she assented, "and this last bit of news beats all the rest, and he got it straight from the rector's, too; and they do say as old Vant and St. Denys Dolmar has heard of it, and is going to raise a big row. No wonder my lady's uneasy."

Mrs. Chudleigh withdrew her chair a short space from the table, and straightened herself with severe dignity.

"I don't ask you for your news, Mrs. Jobson," she said, haughtily; "you can keep it as close as you like—and I must be going before it grows quite dark."

"Heaven bless us, Mrs. Chudleigh," ejaculated the affrighted lodge-mistress, "don't be so crusty; do give a body time to draw breath. Why, in course, I meant to tell you—I said so when Jobson told me—says I, I shan't breathe a word to a living soul, excepting Mrs. Chudleigh, and she has a right to know."

The housekeeper drew up her chair again, and nodded approvingly, and her hostess continued:

"I'll tell you what it is—they say that Lady Grace is not dead!"

Mrs. Chudleigh bounded from her chair, so great was her astonishment, and so did the young man in the waiting-room.

"Not dead?" she cried; "who is it then that lies under the marble by the side of Lord Heathcote?"

"That's what we can't guess," chuckled Mrs. Jobson; "but she's not Lady Grace, so they say, and, if it is true, no wonder my lady feels uneasy."

The housekeeper arose to her feet, shaking in every limb, and the young man in the waiting-room, with a face like death, opened the door softly and glided out. The keen air revived him in a measure, but he crossed the ivy-hung porch in a dazed, bewildered way, muttering, incoherently:

"Not dead! did she say that? Can it be true?"

He stumbled on, scarcely conscious of what he was doing, so great was the shock he had received, till he reached the ponderous gate. It stood ajar, for Jobson was in his Christmas cups that night, and without a moment's hesitation the young man passed in. Like a huge shadow at his heels, the Cornish cobbler followed.

The young man bent his steps towards the yew-shaded burying-ground, and there, in the deep darkness, he paused beside the marble shaft that bore the name he held so dear and sacred. He pressed his throbbing brow against the toy stone, and strove to collect his scattered thoughts.

Not dead! and he had mourned her with such bitter grief. A wild thrill made the very blood in his veins leap. Could it be true? Should he ever look upon her sweet, living face again? Would not some voice from that little grassy mound at his feet answer him? But no sound responded to his passionate cry but the wild wailing of the storm and the distant chiming of the Christmas bells. He turned away with a heavy heart, for he had a task to perform that must not be neglected.

The grim front of the grand old Abbey was one blaze of light, and sounds of music and revelry rose even above the din of the storm. Lady Heathcote and her guests had begun their Christmas carnival.

The young stranger struck into a winding path that led to the rear of the building, and pursued his way through the darkness till he reached the old nursery that adjoined the Abbey.

It had fallen into ruins years before, and he entered without trouble, and, taking a small lantern from his pocket, he struck a light. The mouldy walls and dusty corridors presented a gloomy spectacle, but he pursued his way boldly till he reached what had once been a chapel.

Crouching along in the shadows, with the stealthy tread of a panther, his yellow eyes gleaming like flame in the darkness, the cobbler still followed.

The young man paused for an instant, half stifled by the close air, and glanced around him with a little tarry of terror as he called to mind a former night adventure in the self-same vaults of this haunted Abbey.

A sudden sound of subdued breathing arrested his attention, and he fancied that something moved in the deep gloom beyond.

For an instant he shivered with horror, but in a breath his young nerves were like steel. He plunged into the darkness, but no object rewarded his search but a great owl that rustled down from its perch and flapped past him with a hoarse cry.

Smiling at his foolish fancies, the young man returned to his task. He placed his lantern on one corner of the altar, and taking a small chisel from his pocket he proceeded to insert it beneath one of the marble tiles that formed the elevated dais in front. It moved after one or two efforts, disclosing a small aperture in which was a green leather case, which he removed, then very deliberately replaced the tile, and sitting down on the altar steps he proceeded to examine his treasure.

The box opened with a spring, and within it, on a bed of white plush, was a great, massive ring. The young man took it out and turned it to the light, and a sharp cry escaped his lips, for as the wondrous opal ring flashed like a star upon his sight away down in its clear depths he saw the terrible semblance of a human eye.

He turned the famed jewel over and over, examining it intently, and presently his quick eye discovered a secret spring. He pressed upon it with his finger, and the ring flew open, disclosing a small cavity just below the opal setting, in which was a small folded parchment.

He took it out, and unfolded it with trembling fingers.

The writing on it was so minute, and so faded by age, that he found it exceedingly difficult to decipher. But he succeeded at last, spelling it out word by word:

"The Heathcote treasures are concealed in the secret vault, under the fifth tile, at the foot of the great mausoleum."

The young man refolded the precious parchment, replaced it in the ring, and closing the secret spring returned the old jewel to its case.

"At last," he murmured as he deposited the case

in his breast pocket, "the wonderful secret is discovered, after so much searching and surmising, and the whole thing has been thrust into my hands entirely independent of my will or wish. It places me in an embarrassing position, and a dangerous one too, I'm thinking. But I'll take heart, and for poor old Margaret's sake I'll hunt this mystery to the end."

(To be continued.)

NEGLECTED VEGETABLES.

POKEWEED GREENS.—Few of our readers are probably aware of the excellent quality of the young shoots of Pokeweed for greens. The root of this plant has had, and still possesses, quite a reputation for its medicinal virtues; but we fear that very few know that the young stems in spring are a very good substitute for spinach or asparagus, and may be prepared for the table in a similar manner. We have used it for a number of years, and think it answers the purpose very well, and is more easily produced than either of the other two plants named. The Pokeweed will grow in almost any kind of soil, provided it is not too wet; but the richer the better, and more abundant and tender the shoots. Severe cutting does not injure it any more than asparagus, and a new crop will be produced in succession during the entire summer if desired. The small one or two-year-old plants are preferable to larger ones for transplanting, and they should be given plenty of room. Rows 4 feet apart and the plants 3 feet in the row is none too much; and liberal manuring and good clean culture will show their effect in strong and vigorous shoots. Those who are fond of spring and summer greens, and have no bed of spinach or other plants to furnish a supply, can scarcely do better than set out a few roots of Pokeweed. To prevent plants becoming too numerous in the garden, cut off the flower stems soon after they appear.—X.

MYSTERY OF THE HAUNTED GRANGE.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IT was the afternoon of the first of November. It was about four o'clock, and already the gas was lit and glimmered in a ghostly way through drizzle and fog.

At the window of a lodging-house in Gilbert's Gardens a woman sat, looking out at the wretched prospect; at the dark, drifting clouds; at the ceaseless rain, beating heavily against the glass; at the blue-nosed pedestrians hurrying by, with umbrellas and overcoats; at the one lamp, flaring redly at the nearest corner—a woman, pale, and wan, and haggard, changed almost beyond recognition—Alice!

Only seven weeks had gone by since that warm September night when, for love of Francis Earls-court, she had fled from home and friends, and already the end had come. It was the natural ending of all such stories; but how was she to know that? Mad passion for a fortnight, cooling passion for another, satiety, weariness, disgust.

The end had come. It was only the old, old story, told, and told, and told—she had staked all on one throw, and—lost!

She had sat for hours as she sat now, her hands lying heavily in her lap, her haggard eyes fixed on the murky London sky. The room was as pleasant as it is in the nature of London lodgings over to be. A fire burned in the grate, and on the little centre table stood a glass, filled with yellow and pink roses. Their fragrance filled the room—their sweetness breathing of the summer dead, and of all she had lost with its fading.

The nearest church clock struck the quarter-past four. As she heard it she moved restlessly for the first time, and a spasm of intense pain crossed her face.

"He should have been here an hour ago," she said, in a sort of frightened whisper. "Will he not come after all? Will he never come again?"

She got up, and walked over to the mirror on the mantel, looking with piteous eyes at her own wasted face and figure. She had been crying for hours, crying until there were no more tears to flow, and she beheld the natural result—dim, sunken eyes, a bloated and swollen face.

Alice had wept for hours, until eyes and heart ached alike. She had dressed herself in her one best dress—poor soul! a dress of blue and white that "Frank" had once said he liked, but it hung loose from her shrunken figure now.

Beauty and youth and brightness had all gone. She shrank away, almost in horror, from the sight of her own pallid face, her hollowed, dulled eyes!

"He used to praise my pretty looks!" she said. "What will he think of me now?"

She felt, without being able to think very deeply on that or any other subject, that her pretty looks had been the only links that bound him to her. And her face was faded, her beauty gone in seven weeks! Her pretty face and her tender heart were all the gifts she had—good and pleasant gifts, but not likely to long enchain a man of Lord Montalien's stamp. She was not clever—she could not talk to him, could not amuse him, and he yawned in her face three days after that ceremony in the church of St. Ethelfrida.

Already the fatal spell of a fresher beauty had captivated him—the friend she loved best on earth, the friend who best loved her, had taken him from her! The sparkling beauty, the saucy, self-willed, out-spoken, graceful audacity of Paulina Lisle held Lord Montalien enthralled.

It was ten days since he had been near Gilbert's Gardens—ten endless, dreary days. She had nothing to do, nothing to read, not a soul to speak to, only her own miserable, never-dying suspicions for company—until yesterday, when a friendly face and kindly eyes from home had looked upon her, and brought some roses fresh from Speckhaven which imparted a breath of country sweetness to her dingy room. She had written last night in her desperation to her husband; and now as the rainy afternoon wore on she waited his coming.

As she turned from the glass the rapid roll of wheels caught her ear. She darted to the window. Thank Heaven!—oh, thank Heaven!—he had come—He was here at last! He sprang from the cab, bade the driver wait, and a mighty double knock a second after made the house shake.

Mrs. Hows went to the door in person. She knew that imperious knock well, and was almost as glad to hear it again as her lodger. Two weeks' rent was due, and "Mrs. Brown," her lodger, never seemed to have any money, and spent her time in tears and loneliness. It dawned upon the landlady's mind that all was not right, and that the sooner she got rid of her the better.

"Which a man that muffles himself up to that degree that you never see no more of him than two eyes and a nose is no better than he ought to be, and must have something to hide. I declare to you, mum, Mrs. Brown, if she is Mrs. Brown, has been lodging with me high upon seven weeks, and he a coming and a going all that time, and I never once, since the first night, had a good look at his face. A tall and 'andsome man as ever I see; but 'andsome is as 'andsome does, and a military swell he is, I know, and no more plain Mr. Brown than you or me," she said one day to a neighbour who had dropped in.

She admitted him now, dropping a courtesy, and scanning him curiously. But the passage was dark at all times, doubly dark now, and the tall form of "Mr. Brown" brushed past her and dashed up the stairs and into her lodger's room.

With a cry of joy, a sob not to be suppressed, Alice flung herself into his arms.

"Frank! oh, Frank! you have come at last! I thought you were never going to come again."

"You took good care not to let me do that! What do you mean, madam, by writing to me? Did I not expressly forbid you ever to write or come near my lodgings?"

He turned the key in the door, breaking angrily free from her encircling arms, flung himself into the easy-chair she had placed for him before the fire, and looked at her with a darkly angry glance.

She stretched out her hands to him, shrinking away like a child who has been struck a blow.

"Forgive me, Frank; I meant no harm. I was so lonely—oh, so lonely; and it is ten days since—"

Her voice broke, in spite of her. She covered her face, and her suppressed sobbing filled the room.

"Oh, Heaven!" groaned her visitor, "here it is again, before I am two seconds in the house! Tears and sobs, reproaches and sobs—always the same! And you complain that I don't come to see you."

He seized the poker and gave the fire a vicious dig. He had thrown his felt hat on the floor beside him, and his thin, sallow face was set in an angry scowl. He looked a very different man from the suave and courteous gentleman who bent over the chair of Paulina Lisle at the theatre only the night before.

She swallowed her sobs by a great effort, and, coming timidly over, knelt down beside him.

"Don't be hard on me, Frank," she pleaded; "I don't mean to reproach you; but I am so much alone, and I have nothing to do, and no one to speak to, and I get thinking of home, and get low-spirited. Won't you tell me, Frank, why you have stayed away so long?"

He looked at her with hard, cruel eyes.

"Because I have grown tired of coming. Will that do, Mrs. Brown?"

"Frank!"

He was still looking at her, searchingly, pitilessly,

not once shrinking from the gaze of the large, horror-stricken eyes.

"You have not improved in my absence, at all events," he said, with a short laugh. "You are actually growing old and ugly. 'Beauty is fleeting'—certainly in your case. If you had looked like this down at Speckhaven I don't think—well, I don't think I should ever have given you the trouble of coming up to town! Pray what have you been doing since I saw you last?"

"Nothing." Her voice seemed hoarse and unnatural. "Only thinking of you."

"A very unprofitable way of spending your time. And now that you have sent for me will you have the kindness to inform me what you want?"

"Frank, you ask that question!"

"A very natural question I think. In the first place, will you tell me how you discovered my address at all?"

She rose up from her kneeling position, stung to the quick by the insolence more even of his tone and look than his words. She shed no tears now; she felt cold as death, and her shrinking eyes met his steadily at last.

"I had the right to send for you, my lord—to go to you if I chose. I am your wife!"

He listened with a smile, his head lying against the back of the chair—a smile of insufferable insolence.

"My wife?" he repeated. "Well, yes, of course, we did go to the church of St. Ethelfrida together. But, my dear Alice, let me give you one piece of advice—don't presume on that little ceremony. Don't write to me again, and don't visit me until I give you leave. Perhaps you did not hear my question. Let me repeat it—Where did you find out my address?"

"Your brother told me."

"My brother!"

He started at the words, then, for the first time, his eyes fell upon the roses on the table. He sprang to his feet.

"My brother has been here?" he cried.

"He has."

She answered him quietly.

Her heart felt cold and still in her breast; but she had no intention of disturbing him with "scenes or tears" now.

He strode towards her, grasping her wrist until the marks of his cruel fingers remained—his face white to the very lips, as was his way when really moved.

"You dared do it! You dared, after all I said, bring him here! Guy, of all men! You dared tell him—"

"I told him nothing. My lord, will you let me go? You hurt me!"

He dropped his hold, looking down at her with a dangerous light in his pale blue eyes.

"How came he here? You must have brought him, or he never would have found you out. Tell me the truth, I command you."

She met his angry gaze with a calm steadiness quite new in his experience of her.

"He came with me the first night. You remember he travelled up with me from Speckhaven. He was very kind—he was always kind. I don't know whether he suspected our secret or not. I know he advised me to go back while there was yet time."

"I wish to Heaven you had taken his advice!"

"Yes," she answered, still very quietly, "it is a pity. But we won't speak of that now. It was late that night when we reached London; it was all strange to me; and I was afraid, and I asked him to come with me here."

The pressure tightened on her wrist again; he drew his breath for a moment hard.

"You did! After all your promises—after all I told you—you brought him here!"

"I brought him here; but I told him nothing, and I never laid eyes on him since until yesterday."

"He was here yesterday?"

"He was. Frank, do you know they think at home I fled with him—that that I am—not a wife?"

"Yes, I happen to be quite aware of that fact; and, what is more, I mean they shall continue to think so! Hear me out, if you please, and don't interrupt. Do you suppose I am going to ruin my prospects by acknowledging my marriage with you? A pretty story, forsooth, for Belgravia, that Lord Montalien has married his bailiff's daughter!"

"Lord Montalien should have thought of that seven weeks ago."

"I know it. No need for you to remind me what an idiot I have been. What brought my precious younger brother here yesterday?"

"Friendship. Only that. Mr. Guy was always the kindest of friends, the noblest of gentlemen. He thought of me; he brought me those flowers from Montalien," her eyes lighting, "because he fancied they would remind me of home."

The nobleman seized the roses and flung them into the fire.

The girl started forward with a cry; if he had

struck her he would hardly have done a more brutal thing.

"Silence!" he said, fiercely. "Go on! What brought him here? Did you dare to tell him that I—"

"I told him nothing—nothing. Heaven help me! I have kept your secret, Lord Montalien, at the price of my own good name. I have broken my mother's heart, bowed my father's head in sorrow and shame, giving up the home where I was happy, the friends who cared for me, for you; and this—this is my reward."

She laid her arm upon the mantle, and bowed her face upon it. But in the dark heart of the man beside her there was neither pity nor remorse.

"Will you swear to me my brother knows nothing—that you have not told him?"

"I have not told him," she reiterated, and did not lift her ashen face as she made the reply.

He turned, and began pacing to and fro up and down the room. He wanted to shake her off, to have done with her for ever, to get her out of the country even, and to do that it was wise to goad her to despair and desperation. He must get rid of her—that was the one inevitable thing to be done, and to get rid of her quietly, without scandal or exposure, she must still think herself his wife.

The time to tell her the truth had not yet come. He must get rid of her, and at once; and kindness here would do more than harshness or recrimination. He came over and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Forgive me, Alice," he said, "and forget my unkind words. You know, as well as I do, that I love you as dearly as ever; that I did not mean them; but I am out of sorts and out of temper to-day. I have a thousand things to worry and annoy me of which you cannot dream; and it did startle me to know Guy had been here. I am sorry I destroyed your flowers. I will send you a handsome bouquet to-morrow. Come, look up, and say we are friends again."

She lifted her head slowly and looked at him. Even he, bad to the core, harder than iron, shifted away from the sight of settled despair in those haggard eyes.

"Do what you will, say what you will, Frank, I can never be other than your friend."

Her voice was broken and low, no tinge of colour came into the white face as he stooped and kissed her.

She knew the end had come—her heart never again beat with hope while she lived.

"That is my own little Alice! And now, to prevent a repetition of such visits, you must leave this lodging at once."

"Yes."

"This very evening I will engage another, and to-morrow I will send a cab for you and your belongings. Early to-morrow morning you will be quite ready to go!"

"Yes."

"As it can't be any particular pleasure to me to keep moving you about from one London lodging to another, for fear of detection, what do you say to going down to the country, or even out of England for a while? You would be better and happier, I am sure. You are used to a country life, and I would come to see you just as often. What do you say?"

"I have nothing to say. I will do whatever you please."

"That is settled then."

He was delighted with her easy acquiescence. Nothing would be more simple than to send her out of the country altogether and for ever.

"To-morrow you will leave here, and within the week you shall go to some pleasant country home, either in or out of England, where you will remain until it is in my power to proclaim you to the world as my wife. You hear, Alice?"

"I hear," she answered, wearily. "Frank!" She looked up at him suddenly, "is it true that Paulina Lisle is in London?"

"Guy told you that among his other news, I suppose?"

"He did. He told me too that you were her lover, or that report said so."

"He told you a falsehood! I visit at the house of Sir Vane Charteris, and I see Miss Lisle, of course." He spoke carelessly enough, but in his heart he recorded a vow to add this to the large measure of hatred he already owed his younger brother. "I meant to speak to you of her. Why did you write and tell her of your elopement and intended marriage, after all my injunctions of secrecy and your promises? Was it well done, Alice?"

"I meant no harm. I did not tell her whom I was going to marry."

"But you knew she would suspect. You knew she was aware how greatly I always admired you; but I overlook it, Alice—that and all the rest—and look forward to the day when I can proclaim you to the world as my lawful wife. And now farewell. To-morrow afternoon, at this time, I will visit you at your new lodging."



[FACE TO FACE AGAIN.]

His lips touched her forehead in another traitor kiss, then the door opened and closed, and he had gone. Gone!

Alice, sitting there alone before the fire, knew her fate—knew in her heart that he had spoken falsely to her—that he would never proclaim her as his wife—that hope was at an end—that her life was done. She touched no food, she had no sleep that night. She lay listening in a sort of dull stupor of misery to the beating rain, to the complaining wind, to the church clock marking the passage of the hours. She had loved him, she loved him still, and this was the end.

The cab came early next morning for "Mrs. Brown."

Before leaving the previous day his lordship had paid the landlady, and told her of her lodger's departure. And now, in the dark November morning, she watched her drive away almost with regret.

"She looked like death itself as she bade me good-bye," Mrs. Howe said afterwards; "it went to my heart only to see her."

The new lodging to which the cabman drove her was in one of the obscure streets leading from the Strand to the river—dingier, poorer, closer, than that which she had left. But she scarcely noticed how squalid it was, scarcely observed how unutterably wretched she herself looked.

"What does it matter," she thought, turning away from the glass, "since there is no one in the world to care?"

Then she lay down, and the dull, gnawing, ceaseless pain at her heart seemed somehow to go, and in its place her happy girlhood came back. The dark, wretched room, the foggy daylight faded away, once more the green fields of Montalien, rich with golden corn, the meadows sweet with the scent of new-mown hay, the voice of her mother, the waving trees, the golden summer sky, all came back to her; and Francis Earlscount's eyes looked love, and his voice spoke softly and sweetly, and his strong arm encircled her waist; and her eyes closed, and with the smile of a happy child on her face she fell asleep.

She slept for hours. The afternoon wore on—the roar of the great city, of the busy Strand were unheard—even the opening of the door, and the entrance of the man of whom she dreamed, failed to arouse her.

He looked at her as she slept without one feeling of pity for the heart he had broken, for the life he had blighted. He had tired of her, and he must remove her out of the country that he might marry Paulina Lisle. Nothing remained now but that.

While he stood irresolute whether or not to awaken

her there was a tap at the door, and the landlady, with a startled face, looked in.

"If you please, sir, and asking your pardon for disturbing of you and your good lady, would you come upstairs just a moment? The third-floor front's a dying, and a dying hard, and he says he can't go until he has made his confession. There ain't a soul in the house to go for the parson or doctor, and I daren't leave him alone. Would you be so good, kind gentleman, as to step up to his room while I run for the nearest clergyman?"

The "kind gentleman" addressed stared at her haughtily in amazement at her presumptuous request.

What was her "third-floor front" to him, dying though its inmate might be, that he should trouble himself in the matter?

"He says he has a confession to make about some very great lady he knew once, and about a great crime he helped to commit nearly twenty years ago. He can't die he says until he has confessed it. Maybe it's only his raving, but he says the lady's name was Miss Olivia Lyndith."

Lord Montalien swung round, amazed, interested at once.

"Miss Olivia Lyndith," he muttered. "Lady Charteris? Now what the deuce does this mean? Lead the way, my good woman; I'll go up and hear what your third-floor front has to say."

He followed her up the dark winding stairs, and into the stifling attic room, where, on a wretched truckle bed, a gaunt and emaciated form was stretched. There was no fire in the little room, and the sickly, foggy daylight hardly found its way through the blurred, dirty glass of its one window.

"Here is a kind gentleman who says he will stay with you, Porter," the landlady said, soothingly. "Now do keep quiet, like a good soul, and I'll run round for Mr. Spearman."

She placed a chair by the bedside, and was hurrying away, but the dying man raised himself on his elbow, and called after her, shrilly:

"Fetch pen and ink and paper, Mrs. Young. He must write it down and give it to her if she is alive. I can't die, I can't, with the story unfold. I'm sorry I ever did it. I see her face so still and white; oh, Heaven! so still and white—sleeping and waking, night and day for ever. You'll write it down, sir? You look like a gentleman, and you'll find her, and give it to her, if she's alive? Promise me that!"

He glared up at Lord Montalien's face with hollow, wild eyes.

"I don't know of whom you're talking, my good fellow," his lordship answered, coolly. "Who is she?"

"Twenty years ago her name was Miss Olivia Lyn-

dith. She married Sir Vane Charteris, Baronet. You're a gentleman—perhaps you have heard of Sir Vane Charteris?"

His hollow eyes were full of burning eagerness as he asked the question.

"Well, yes, I have heard of Sir Vane Charteris."

"And Lady Charteris?"

"And Lady Charteris."

"Is she alive? Tell me that—is Lady Charteris alive, and well?"

"Lady Charteris is alive certainly, but not quite well. She has had some great trouble in her past life, which she has never got over to this day."

The dying man wrung his hands in a paroxysm of anguish.

"I know it—I know it! and I did it! I wish I had dropped dead before I ever consented! And now I am dying, and her face haunts me night and day. But she's alive, and it's not too late yet. Perhaps he's alive too."

"Who?"

"Her husband—him that she loved so dearly."

"You mean Sir Vane Charteris, I presume?"

"No, no, no! She hated him! I mean the other—her first husband—her real husband—him that she ran away with—Robert Lisle."

"Robert Lisle is alive and well."

The dying man uttered a cry—a shrill, wordless cry of delight.

"Thank Heaven! thank Heaven! then it's not too late! Where is he? Can you tell me that? Not in England?"

"Not in England, of course, since he is a criminal amenable to the law."

"He is no criminal. It was me that did it—me! And Mr. Geoffrey Lyndith paid me for doing it. I wish my right hand had dropped off when I lifted it against him! But I'll tell you all, and you'll write it down, and Robert Lisle will come back, and perhaps Heaven will forgive me. Do you think it will if I confess all—all?"

"Well—let us hope so," replied his lordship, rather out of his depth. "Who are you, to begin with?"

He drew the paper towards him, took up the pen, and prepared to write. He was full of curiosity and interest. What revelation of villainy was this he was about to hear?

"I'm James Porter; and I was valet to Mr. Geoffrey Lyndith twenty years ago. Will you promise, on your honour as a gentleman, to give this paper you are going to write into the hands of Lady Charteris and no other when I am dead?"

"I promise. Go on."

(To be continued.)



[SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER.]

BREAKING THE CHARM.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Tempting Fortune," "Scarlet Berries," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XVI.

Prince Henry: A sudden darkness falls upon the world!
Oh! what a vile and abject thing am I,
That purchase length of days at such a cost.

The Golden Legend.

It was a strange group that which was assembled in the fisherman's cottage in the gray dawn of an early morning, which broke stormy and lowering over the low-lying coast.

Milly's heart was full of thankfulness for her escape, but Lord Cardington did not seem to dwell much upon his deliverance.

His position was not a pleasant one, for he found himself, when he least expected it, thrown, by a peculiar combination of circumstances, into unwelcome proximity with the two women whom he had of all others most injured.

As soon as she had sufficiently recovered Milly got up and approached his lordship, who was sitting moodily before the fire.

Ariadne was standing near the window, looking fondly at Lord Cardington, and ever and anon watching Milly, whom she regarded as her rival, with lynx-like eyes.

Hardy had gone to the beach to pick up such fragments as might be swept on shore by the waves from the wreck, while his wife busied herself in getting ready such a breakfast for her visitors as her humble means afforded.

"It is useless," said Milly, "for me to continue my disguise any longer. You may guess, Lord Cardington, that I did not resolve to renounce my sex for a time and appear as a man from any lingering love or affection for you."

"You have been a spy upon me!" exclaimed his lordship. "You have adopted an odious system, and it is a fortunate thing for me that I have discovered the ruse."

"That may or may not be. I promised to obey the dying wishes of my poor, dear murdered friend, Mrs. Mallison."

"Murdered!" said his lordship, with a start. "Who says she was murdered?"

"It was generally supposed that she did not come to her end by fair means."

"The jury returned an open verdict, therefore I shall be obliged to you if you will confine yourself to generalities, and not make a decided charge on so grave a matter."

"I was not aware that you were so sensitive, and certainly did not mean to convey any imputation upon you," answered Milly. "But let that pass. What I intended to observe was that Mrs. Mallison evinced the utmost anxiety for her daughter's welfare. I am persuaded that Ariadne still loves you. Her fond heart clings to you in spite of your villainous treatment. It is one more proof of the lasting power of a woman's affection, even when it has been trampled upon and crushed by the cruel treatment of deceitful man."

"I am sorry to say that I cannot return the affection," answered his lordship; "all that is past and gone. Why you allude to what once has been I cannot imagine."

"You shall hear. The only reparation you can make Ariadne Mallison for your cruel abandonment of her is to marry her, and I am sure I shall be doing what would please Mrs. Mallison were she alive by putting the most urgent pressure upon you to compel you to make her your wife."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," replied Lord Cardington.

The gleam of pleasurable hope which had started to Ariadne's eyes died out again, and she remained stony and impassive, watching with anxious curiosity the wordy war which was going on between his lordship and Milly.

In a pocket-book which had escaped serious wetting during her immersion in the sea were some papers, one of which she produced.

"This, my lord," she exclaimed, "is a forgery of my name. I obtained it from Mr. Mordecai Moss, and I can prove that you are the forger. My chain of evidence is complete. You are in my power. Your prospect of marrying Miss Goldsmith has been utterly destroyed by me, and you know as well as I do that you are ruined and hopelessly insolvent. There only remains to be added public exposure and consequent disgrace."

"Why do you display this fiendish malignity towards me?" asked Lord Cardington, covering before her and afraid to meet her gaze.

Milly's eyes flashed. She drew herself up to her full height, presenting a strange, weird aspect as she stood with her arm outstretched, dressed as a man, yet having her long and lovely hair streaming down her neck and over her shoulders.

"Why?" she repeated; "do you, Claude, Lord Cardington, ask me why I am your enemy? Have you forgotten the trap you laid for me, and the consequent misery that I encountered? You killed my father, you drove my mother mad. You have made me an outcast, without a home, and with only one

purpose in life, and that is to wreak upon you the vengeance prompted by my hatred towards yourself."

"I had no intention or wish that you should suffer," he answered.

"It is my will that you should experience some of the misery I have undergone through your agency. The iron must enter your soul, my lord; I know that you dislike your victim, but she is foolish and weak enough to still love you, and I tell you—ay, I command you to agree to marry her unless you want me to hound you down and place you in the felon's dock at the Old Bailey, where the punishment for the forgery you have committed will be a condemnation to work like a slave in chains for many years on that barren island near here in which is the convict's home."

There was a pause for a brief space, and, seeing how he was caught in the meshes of the web that Milly had woven for him, Lord Cardington called Ariadne to him.

She was awaiting this summons, and with a beating heart she ran to his side. He was wet and shivering in spite of the large fire before which he was sitting, his clothes were torn, his face haggard and worn, his hair matted, and his appearance forlorn as that of any castaway, but to her he was the same spoiled and petted darling whom she had loved in the days of her fresh and ardent affection.

Casting a look of gratitude upon Milly which showed that all her jealousy had now vanished, Ariadne knelt at his feet.

"If you cannot conjure up any shadow of your lost affection for me," she pleaded, in a tearful voice, "will you suffer me to love you?"

He could not hide from her a look of repugnance, and this was the more remarkable as Ariadne Mallison's beauty had not degenerated; affliction had made her somewhat sad and thoughtful, but to many minds that characteristic would have added an additional charm.

"You ask me to love you," he said, "while you have been a thorn in my side, and thwarted me on many occasions."

"Because I did not wish you to marry another woman. I always clung to the hope that you would be mine some day, and that was my reason for living among strangers and refusing to go home to my friends, who I knew full well would never allow me to see you again or have any intercourse with you."

"You are harder than Miss Haines," exclaimed Lord Cardington, with a satirical laugh, pointing to Milly.

"How so?"

"She simply asks me to marry you, while you

beg for my love. As I am in her power and she holds the whip hand, as we say when driving, I suppose I shall have to comply with her command. I may marry you to save myself from the consequence of my own folly, but loving you is a very different matter."

"Never mind," replied Ariadne, still on her knees before him, as she uttered a sigh of resignation. "I will be content with loving you and see if I cannot make you return my love by a life of constant devotion. I have prayed so fervently that you might be mine. Heaven has heard my prayer."

There was an air of simple, fervid piety about the tone in which she spoke that showed her whole heart was set upon having him for a husband and that was indeed the object of her life.

"Very well. You shall be Lady Cardington," he exclaimed.

With a choking sob of irrepressible emotion she threw herself into his arms and lay upon his breast.

At this moment, which was an embarrassing one to Lord Cardington, the door of the cottage was flung violently open and a man dressed in the yellow uniform of a convict rushed in.

"What do you want here?" asked Mrs. Hardy, who had just come into the common-room from the kitchen to lay the cloth for breakfast.

The man was about forty years of age, and had a truculent and forbidding aspect.

He looked round him in a startled manner, and replied:

"Shelter, for the love of Heaven! I have escaped from Portland Island, and would rather die a thousand deaths than return to the horrible slavery I have had to undergo!"

"You have committed some crime for which you deserve punishment, or you would not be a convict," said Mrs. Hardy.

The man was wet from the swim which he had undergone in reaching the shore. Though he had filed his chains off, there was still a splash attached to one leg, and he seemed exhausted and prostrated by his exertions.

"Have you no pity, woman?" he said, fiercely.

"None for such as you. Go," she replied.

"Go! Where?"

"Anywhere. Go, or I will call my husband."

"Go!" repeated the wretched man, "and this is the boasted charity of Christians in a Christian country. Those who have once transgressed are treated like dogs. There is no such thing as charity in this world."

He let his hands fall by his sides, and an expression of the gravest despair overspread his face.

For the moment he appeared to have lost all hope.

CHAPTER XVII.

On your life take heed! Old Play.

THE sullen booming of the gun, announcing that the escape of a convict had been discovered, which had not ceased firing at intervals since Hardy first heard and called attention to it, again sounded.

It recalled the convict to himself.

Suddenly his eyes encountered the gaze of Lord Cardington, who had been sitting somewhat in the shadow, and had thus hitherto escaped the man's notice.

He uttered a cry like that of a wild beast.

Hope dawned once more in his breast.

"Ha!" he cried. "There is one here who must and will save me. Luck is on my side after all. Fortune has given her wheel a turn when I least expected the fickle jade to help me."

"Do you allude to me?" said Lord Cardington, regarding the prisoner curiously.

His crooked hair, repulsive face, wild and haggard look, his yellow uniform with a number on the back, and the chain which yet dangled from his leg gave him an appearance calculated to terrify and disgust.

"Yes, to you," cried the man, boldly. "I am Thomas Rudd, your hired murderer. We have met at last. I am the man whom you paid to hurry a fellow creature into eternity."

"Ah! What do you mean?" stammered his lordship.

Ariadne, terrified she scarcely knew why, relaxed her embrace and stood trembling by his side.

"Have you forgotten that you hired me to murder Mrs. Mallison, of Bryanston Square, because you said she was trying to ruin you, and how you added that you would sweep from your path all who stood in it?"

The man spoke loudly and quickly.

All eyes were fixed upon Lord Cardington, who seemed so overwhelmed by the astonishment of this extraordinary accusation that he could not speak.

"Who did you say?" asked Milly, wishing to make sure that her ears did not deceive her.

"Mrs. Mallison, of Bryanston Square," replied Rudd.

"Did she die by your hand?"

"I stabbed her to the heart, having let myself into the house with a false key."

"Did you know the name of this man who hired you?"

"No. I never could find him out, and, having been sentenced for another offence, for some months past I had no opportunity of hunting for him."

"His name is Lord Cardington," said Milly.

"I shall not forget it," replied Rudd, with a gleam of savage pleasure.

Ariadne's face seemed as if it was turned into stone. Looking at her beseechingly, Lord Cardington said:

"You do not believe the wild tale of this dangerous fellow, who by his own confession is a thief, a murderer, and a convict under sentence of penal servitude?"

"Oh, Heaven!" almost shrieked Ariadne, in the agony of her heart. "I have nothing left to live for now, for I cannot marry the murderer of my mother."

Milly came to her side, and supported her sinking form, trying to comfort her as only a woman knows how to minister to another in the hour of her dire distress.

The convict meanwhile walked up to Lord Cardington, and, touching him familiarly, said:

"My lord, you must save me, or I will denounce you, and we shall perish together."

His lordship started up, and, speaking to Mrs. Hardy, exclaimed:

"My good woman, have you any place where this man can be concealed?"

"There is a cellar, but—"

"You shall be well paid for your services," interrupted his lordship.

"I can't understand these goings on," exclaimed Mrs. Hardy, in perplexity. "Here am I roused from my good sleep by a wreck, and my husband goes out and brings you fine folks in. My lodger turns out to be a lady, and you all know each other; while one man is not a man at all, but a woman; then comes the convict, and he says the lord's murderer, and now I'm to save him. I shall go stark, staring mad—I know I shall. It's so confused me that I'm not the same woman—I ain't really. I was plain, sane Jane Hardy last night, but who I am or what I am now it would puzzle me or my best friends to know."

At any other time Lord Cardington would have laughed at the good woman's distress, which was comical enough, but now he had too much on his mind to be able to join in any merriment, however mirth-provoking it might be.

Feeling in his pocket, he gave her some gold, which was a most powerful argument with her.

The poor understand the power of gold better than the rich.

Knowing that money is not bestowed unless it is or is to be worked for, she recollected that she had something to do for it. The gold reminded her of what she had forgotten—namely, that the escaped convict was to be hidden somewhere.

In the centre of the apartment in which the several personages were was a trap-door, covered by a small piece of carpet.

This trap communicated with a cellar dug out of the ground, in which Hardy kept such things as nets, fish-hooks, pots of tar, old sails and oars, together with other articles appertaining to the trade of a boatman and fisherman.

It instantly occurred to Mrs. Hardy that the man might be hidden in this place.

If pursued by the wardens of the convict settlement it was evident that he had not been traced to Hardy's abode.

All that his pursuers could do would be to make a search in the cottage for him, as she remembered they had done a few years before on one of the rare occasions of an escape of a prisoner, but, finding nobody, they had gone away and hunted in another direction.

The cellar was a safe receptacle, though the air was confined, and unpleasantly tainted with the smell of fish-nets and tar-pots.

A sound of voices outside roused Rudd to the immensity of his danger.

"For Heaven's sake, make haste, woman!" he exclaimed. "The officers are without!"

"Here—come along; I suppose I must do what I'm paid for," replied Mrs. Hardy.

She drew aside the bit of carpet, and disclosed the trap-door.

Rudd fell upon it and dragged it up by an iron ring.

"It's not wholesome," remarked Mrs. Hardy, "so you must put up with a bit of stalling."

"That's nothing," answered Rudd. "Replace the carpet carefully after shutting the trap, and swear that you know nothing about me."

"Nay," rejoined Mrs. Hardy, who was of mercenary and avaricious disposition, "I'm not going to swear. I must be paid extra for that."

"Hold your tongue. His lordship will see you through it. You can have what you want," cried

Rudd, who had halfway descended the rude ladder which led into the cellar. "But," he added, looking fiercely around him, "if one of you say a word which is calculated to betray me, remember I am armed, and mean to sell my life dearly. If I am found, you, my lord, shall die with me on the scaffold."

There was a knocking at the door, and the sound of many voices.

"Hush! How the man talks!" whispered Mrs. Hardy.

Rudd let fall the trap door and disappeared, while the carpet was carefully replaced, and the room resumed its usual condition.

When the convict was safely hidden Mrs. Hardy opened the door and admitted two men dressed in the uniform of the wardens at Portland Island.

"What is it?" she asked. "Any more of your fellows escaped? I mind well the last time you came here. You didn't find any one, and why? The poor creature was drowned swimming across. But why do I say 'poor creature'? They are the worst of the world, and all they get they deserve."

"It is an escape, as you have rightly supposed," answered the first warden, whose name was Crabbe, and he had established a high reputation for sagacity. "But you look flustered, miss. What has happened to you?"

"There's been a wreck, and those who have been saved from it are in my cottage. It has put me out a bit."

"Where is the husband?"

"Down on the beach," answered Mrs. Hardy.

"Seeing if he can pick up anything, eh? Just like the fishermen in these parts; they think more of wrecking than of saving life. However, that's no business of mine."

"A plague take you. What is your business, then?" asked the fishermen's wife, who did not like these attacks upon her husband, though, as a matter of fact, the man's character in the neighbourhood in which he lived was not without merit.

"That's what I'm coming to without delay," replied Crabbe as he exchanged a significant glance with his companion. "Have you seen any of our convicts?"

"Not one, as I'm alive. I've not seen a soul," answered Mrs. Hardy.

The woman protested over much, and her excessive anxiety to make him believe what she said caused such a shrewd officer as he was to additionally distrust her.

"You won't object to our searching the place?" he said.

"I don't know why you should after what I have told you."

"Your objection will not make much difference one way or the other," answered Crabbe; adding to his coadjutor—"Jack, take a look now, while I remain on the basement and keep my weather eye open."

"Right," replied the other officer, who, with the keenness of a bloodhound, commenced his search.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mar.: Be undone.

Arm.: Undone I am, whatever course I take,

Dreadful alternative! Despair or death.

Or everlasting shame. The Black Prince.

THE two girls were so absorbed with their own thoughts that they paid little attention to the game at "hide and seek" which was being played before their eyes between the escaped convict and the wardens in pursuit.

Lord Cardington, on the other hand, had an object in the man's getting away, and while Mrs. Hardy went over the house with one officer he got up and chatted familiarly with the other.

"Do you often have a break-out of this sort?" he asked.

"Not often, sir," rejoined Crabbe. "We keep too good a look-out for anything of that sort; but it does happen occasionally, in spite of our vigilance. We can't always be watching; there are so many, and we are comparatively so few. The convicts are generally clever, calculating, determined fellows, and they have nothing else to do all day long but work, and while they work they plot and think. This man Rudd is the very old gentleman himself for cunning, and desperate enough to take any man's life. He has an especial spite against me."

"Why?"

"Because I have had him punished severely, and put upon the lowest diet in close confinement for insolence."

"What was he in prison for?" asked Lord Cardington.

"A burglary with violence to the person. His sentence is seven years, and as we are sure to have him this attempt of his at escape won't tend to shorten his term."

"I hope you'll get him," replied Lord Cardington.

"Sorry I can't offer you a cigar, but I am the owner

of the yacht which has been just wrecked, and find myself landed here for the present in the condition of a veritable pauper."

"Thank you all the same, sir. I must get on after we have searched the house," rejoined Crabbe. Lord Cardington retired to his place by the fire, and the officer looked now out of the door, now out of the window, so as to give his quarry no chance of escape should he have taken refuge in the fisherman's cottage.

Milly and Ariadne had retired into a remote part of the room, and the former said, in a tender tone: "Be calm, darling. All will yet be well."

"It is kind of you to try and cheer me," answered Ariadne; "but I feel that my career is over now."

"Why should you despair?"

"I had only one object in life."

"And that was?"

"To marry Claude. He had just consented to make me his wife, through your kind and powerful interposition; but the cup of happiness was dashed rudely from my lips almost as soon as they had tasted it."

"It may not be true," whispered Milly.

"May not! Oh, you know too well how true the accusation is! That dreadful man—that convict who recognized Cardington—that escaped felon who was his tool—told him but a short time back what was conclusive in my mind as to his guilt."

The ears of Crabbe were as quick as those of a weasel, and as Ariadne raised her voice slightly he heard what she said.

The words "convict," "escaped," and others riveted his attention in an instant, and he drew unobtrusively a little nearer to the corner of the room in which the girls had secluded themselves.

"I cannot consent to be the bride of the man who was base enough to hire an assassin to murder my mother because he thought she was trying to avenge my wrongs—anything but that. Oh! I could have forgiven anything in the world but that," continued Ariadne, whose tears fell freely.

"Cannot you be happy with him?"

"Never."

"Take time for reflection. I will not urge you farther now," said Milly.

"Give me the forgery which you have in your possession that places him in your power," continued Ariadne.

"Give it you?"

"Yes."

"For what reason?"

"It matters not. I have a reason, and I have also a use for it. Give it me. I think I have a right to demand it from you because you enjoy my mother's property, which you hold in trust for me."

"I am willing to surrender it."

"The property I do not want, but the privilege of holding the forgery in my own possession I do require, and I ask it of you as a right," persisted Ariadne. "Recollect that it was my money he was trying to rob you of, and it must have been with my money that you obtained possession of it, therefore I call upon you to give it to me."

"It is here, take it," answered Milly, who gave her the forged acceptance.

"That is all I want," replied Ariadne.

Crabbe had been walking restlessly about the room and stamping rather more heavily upon the floor than seemed absolutely necessary.

He had not learnt much from the conversation between the girls, but what he had heard satisfied him that Rudd had been there, and that shelter had been afforded him.

His companion returned from the search of the house, preceded by Mrs. Hardy.

"Well?" ejaculated Crabbe.

"A blank," returned the officer.

"Sound those boards," said Crabbe.

The warder immediately removed the slip of carpet, and the iron ring attached to the trap-door leading to the vault below became revealed to view.

"Lift that up," said Crabbe.

Every word they spoke was audible below. Rudd nerved himself for a terrible struggle.

The trap-door was lifted, and in an instant Rudd sprang up the ladder, knocking the warder down with a blow of his fist.

Crabbe drew a revolver and fired one barrel, but missed his aim.

Rudd rushed upon him and drove his knife deeply into his side.

The unfortunate man fell with a groan.

Then the convict dashed himself against the window, carrying away a splash and a pause.

There was a black-looking gap, a gust of air, and he had gone.

Crabbe breathed heavily, and his companion, who was not much hurt by the knock-down blow, came to his assistance.

He staunch the blood as well as he was able, and

with the help of the fisherman, who came in at the time, and to whom he hastily explained what had occurred, conveyed him upstairs, after which he went for surgical assistance.

Lord Cardington now got up from his seat and approached the two girls.

"It seems that my fate is in your hands, ladies," he exclaimed, "will you have the kindness to tell me what I am to do?"

Ariadne held out to him the forged note.

"Take it, my lord," she exclaimed; "I give you your freedom."

His lordship eagerly seized the piece of paper, and, after glancing at it to assure himself that it was really the forged bill that he had given to Mordecai Moss, tore it into a dozen pieces and threw them into the fire.

"You release me from the promise I made just now?" he said.

"After what I have heard I have no desire to be your wife. You murdered my mother."

"Not I, but—"

"At all events, you were the cause of her death. Our intercourse must cease, but I will do you no farther harm. You have nothing to fear from me, my lord," replied Ariadne.

He put on a rough felt hat, which he saw hanging on a peg, and, buttoning up his coat, which was now getting dry, prepared to depart.

"Good-bye," he said.

"A long good-bye," answered Ariadne, in a gloomy manner.

"As for you," he continued, addressing Milly, "I shall be on my guard in future. No Count Montado shall deceive me. At present you are like a venomous snake whose fangs are drawn."

"We shall meet again," rejoined Milly.

Lord Cardington did not deign to pay her any farther attention or to address any additional remark to her.

He opened the door of the fisherman's cottage, and, passing out, was soon lost to sight in the distance.

Ariadne strained her eyes after his retreating figure until she could see him no longer. Then she seemed to wrest her mind away from him, for she spoke kindly to Milly, and, compassionating her fatigue, offered her the use of her bedroom and the contents of her wardrobe, of which offer Milly was glad to avail herself.

She did not intend to continue the disguise which had served her turn while she passed as Count Montado, and longed for feminine wearing apparel once more.

The wreck and the succession of incidents which had followed had quite unnerved her, and when she got to bed she slept soundly.

"Now!" said Ariadne to herself, as she shut the door and walked downstairs.

The doctor had just been to see the wounded warder, and Mrs. Hardy told her that it was said that the man could not live an hour.

Ariadne stared at her as if she scarcely comprehended what she was saying, and, with a wild light resembling that of insanity streaming from her eyes, she left the cottage, and walked towards the beach, against which the restless sea still dashed itself in huge breakers, for the storm of the night before had not altogether subsided.

(To be continued.)

VICTOR AND VANQUISHED.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Oh, there are
Visions so full of horror that they shake
The soul with fear! Anon.

SILENT, motionless, and apparently crushed by the ceremony of the morning, Lucia de Chastelard passively permitted herself to be locked in her own suite of rooms, and spent the day in a species of trance, her eyes fixed upon the floor.

She paid no heed to the plying ministrations of her kind young attendant, Cicely, nor tasted food, though pressed upon her with sobs of distress and plaintive remonstrances against her despair.

About four o'clock in the afternoon Cicely, hearing the tramping of horses' hoofs in the court, ran to one of the windows, and cried out:

"Mercy on us! there's Mr. Slygreen giving a packet to my lord himself! La! won't poor Gabrielle be glad to see him back! She was sure he meant to marry her, poor woman; and I believe the varlet was only laughing at her all the time."

Miss Chastelard took no notice of her maid's prattle, but clenched her hands till the pretty nails grew rose red. Perhaps she was thinking. "Like master, like man."

"There he goes!" resumed Cicely; "and my lord baron reads the letter. La! if Mr. Slygreen hasn't caught sight of me, and is kissing his

great hand and laying it on his heart. I wonder if he takes me for Gabrielle? How strange the baron looks down there! I think he is scarcely pleased with what he reads. Now he breaks another seal, and opens a letter. My heart! that tickles him—he's laughing outright. Now he pushes the papers all into his breast pocket, and enters the Tower! What a haste he is in! I can't see Mr. Slygreen any more. I suppose he is galloping back to Mr. Hereward like a mad creature. Ah, mistress, forgive me! but I liked Mr. Hereward twenty times better than Captain La Mort, for all he was called such a knave."

Cicely paused in her harmless chatter, for a sigh had escaped her mistress, and she had changed her attitude to bury her face in the cushions of her chair. At the same moment the bolts were withdrawn from the door of the chamber, and some one looked in.

It was Chastelard, whose visage was wrinkled with a thousand hues of malicious exultation. He merely looked in on the bowed figure of his daughter; his eyes twinkled with shameful vindictiveness, and he closed the door again.

Whether in his haste he forgot, or whether by intention he omitted it, who shall know? but he did not lock the door.

For the next half-hour Cicely was engaged in trying to comfort her mistress, and did not go near the window.

At last Lucia raised her head and looked about her. She heard the roar of the sea as it churned at the foot of the Tower cliff, she heard the cawing of the rooks in the scrubby fir trees which clothed the bald sides of the mountain, she heard the moan of the autumn wind as it swept through the turrets high—and within was silence and gloom.

"Has Hereward come?" she asked, abruptly, of her maid, seemingly forgetting that she had never left her side to see what was going on.

"Mademoiselle, the door is unlocked—shall I run out and see?" cried Cicely, eagerly.

"Yes," she replied.

Cicely hastened from the apartment.

Lucia, left to herself, listened intently.

No voices resounded in the ghostly corridors, no footsteps sounded on the winding stairs, nothing was to be heard save the distant hum of the servants' voices in the servants' quarters.

Lucia arose and hurried to the window.

There was no arrival in the court, no hypocritically submissive baron beguiling his foe to mount the turret while his followers stood unsuspecting by.

No. Hereward had heeded her warning. Despising her love, he had not scorned to profit by it; he would beware of the turret step.

Yet he might come vaunting and insolent with a body of the poor, deluded people who believed him a Koutigern, and take possession of the Tower, while her father stood by amazed at the failure of his scheme, which she had so opportunely overheard.

He might come with his protestations of love into her very presence, and outrage her with his treacherous vows—ah, no! ah, no! much she could bear, but not that!

Through a gap in the old stone rampart she could see the merry wee waves leaping up to kiss the white sea-gulls.

And, oh! they looked so cool, so cool that her tired brain yearned towards them!

So she caught a mantilla from its niche, and, wrapping her bright head in its silken folds, she stole from the unguarded chamber, flitted down to the court unseen, and, looking furtively behind her at every step for fear of the baron, her father, gained the gate and ordered Lecane to let her pass.

He dared not refuse, but he vowed in his mind that the baron should hear of this.

Whither fled Lucia?

Poor, shivering, storm-tossed floweret, what was there in you sparkling sea to lure her onward?

She made the circuit of the Tower, and paused on a rocky platform which overhung the water, upon that side where was the window of the dungeon in which Hereward had been imprisoned.

Before her stretched the wide, wild sea, which met a painted sky.

Looking along the coast upon her right hand, she saw a low promontory running out a mile; on this side dashed the surf, vainly struggling to overleap the barrier—on yonder side lay a deep and sullen pool, ink-black, and unruddied by wind or wave.

Beyond the pool rose that beetling crag with its girdling shelf midway—Godiva's Tryste.

Above the shelf was the plateau which overlooked the Tower.

Two miles or more around the tortuous coast line brought one to Godiva's Tryste; across the waves you might have spoken with one who crossed the ledge.

At times the atmosphere favoured the curious law of acoustics, and words whispered yonder were heard here, rung out as with tongues of iron.

Strange sights were seen too—But stay, read on and see what Lucia saw.

It was, perhaps, five of the afternoon, and the sky was whitening overhead, for the sun was sinking. From this pallid dome was descending a luminous mist.

The lining of that cloud was violet-tinged, and the ocean beneath imitated its delicate hue in amethystine waves, while the mighty steppes of rock which rose out of the waters, as if risen from the deeps by a Hercules, or cleft by the hammer of Thor from the mountain's side, glowed faintly, exquisitely pink, like cliffs of cornelian.

It was a landscape at once menacing and alluring, as if death wore a gay smile for once.

The lady gazed upon it with gloomy eye.

In her heart were the tumults, the low murmurings, the deep burnings of a slumbering volcano—here was the chilling and forbidding serenity of an Arctic moon.

The wavelets far beneath her—how gem-bright they were—how beguilingly they curled, and tossed, and glistened under their downy foam-wreaths, as if they gaily laughed out:

"Come down to us! Come down to us! poor broken heart!"

Like Eurydice grieving after her lover, poor Lucia cast one backward glance at the land behind her, and her pretty form swayed back and forwards with the violence of her agitation.

She peered again into the wintry deep, and a "white flash," as it has been called, that harbinger of death, swept from her sweet brow to milk-white chin, and she shuddered as if a spirit had passed by.

Then she heard a low, soft voice in her ear. It said:

"Here we are then—a fitting place to die in."

She gasped; she grew blind, she felt her heart stand still.

The horror passed and she looked for him who had spoken.

What? Nobody?

Impossible. 'Twas in her very ear. Where—where should she look for the sinister face which must accompany such sinister words?

Pulses beat heavily in her ears, a voice spoke, and she lost every word; pulses beat in her temples, she could see nothing; her heart thrilled with something far more terrible than terror—it thrilled with superstitious dread.

Then a calm voice pierced the chaos of her throbbing pulses and she heard this:

"I have deceived you? Yes, and it is you who must die, not Hereward Kentigorne."

Then a quivering, sobbing murmur:

"Spare me—spare me! I will agree to anything. Only for Heaven's sake don't look at me so."

Just Heaven! where were those mysterious speakers?

On either side, behind, before, she looked with affrighted eyes. She was alone.

She lifted her eyes to heaven as if expecting to find the interlocutors in the clouds; and, lo! an awful surprise—she finds them there!

Above Godiva's Trystate floated a pallid mist mid heavens; it was the platform whereon wrestled in mighty strife two phantoms. They were of gigantic height—they were shadow-hued. No silhouette was ever more vague in its resemblance to human verities than those dun ghosts.

They reeled and staggered in a deadly embrace, they clasped and unclasped; a cloak fluttered out in the puff of wind, disclosing the slender frame and lithe, strong arms of youth and strength—disclosing the clutching, crooked hands and flowing beard of an old man. Lucia de Chastelard uttered a sudden and piercing cry:

"Father!"

The horrid pantomime paused, the phantoms listened, the old man made a desperate attempt to free himself.

He was foiled. She saw a shadowed hand upon his throat, a shadowed poniard buried in his bosom; she saw the death-clutch on the fluttering cloak; she saw it wrenched away by a furious hand, which anon groped in the wounded bosom and brought out two shadowy squares—letters!

She saw the convulsed body dropped from the strong young arms, and roll down, down, down, out of the cloud into nothingness.

But something fluttered in its clenched hand, and went down with it.

The murderer too had vanished into space, and the pantomime was over.

Now, in Heaven's name, what was this?

Was it photograph or mirage?

The transparent and borealis-like vapour which swam between Lucia de Chastelard and Godiva's Trystate told a fearful tale.

For many a time had that luminous mist revealed

strange sights to the people of Kentigorne. Ships had appeared there, floating in a cloudy sea many feet above the level of the sea.

Wild animals had leaped across the shadowy scroll.

Men had walked there, secure upon an incorporeal pavement.

It was but a magnifying lens, which pictured with mighty exaggerations what passed in its vicinity.

A murder had just been done in its vicinity.

An old man was dead—by the hand of a young one.

Fly, Lucia, fly! Since murder has been done why linger shuddering here?

An old man! Oh, horrors, is it not her father?

Like the stormy petrel she flew over the jagged pathway and reached the Tower. Her loud knocking brought Lecane gaping to the gate, who gaped more than ever at seeing mademoiselle in her sumptuous robes, with panting breast and face as strange as though she had risen from the grave.

"Is the baron in the Tower?" she panted.

Lecane hesitated.

"Mademoiselle, I was ordered—"

"I ask you, is the baron in the Tower?" reiterated she, wildly.

"No—but my faith, mademoiselle—"

She threw up her hands with a fearful scream.

"He is dead!" said Lucia, and fell senseless at the warder's feet.

Shocked, yet incredulous, Lecane carried her into the Tower, and gave her into the charge of her attendants.

From lip to lip ran the thrilling words which she had uttered.

Dire confusion reigned. Breathless agitators whispered that mademoiselle had gone mad.

When she recovered consciousness she sent for Lecane.

"When did the baron go out?" asked she.

"About four o'clock, mademoiselle," replied Lecane.

"Who accompanied him?"

"No person, mademoiselle."

"What! not a servant to guard him?"

"No, mademoiselle. He received a letter, and went out to answer it in person."

"A letter! Who brought it?"

"The squire of Mr. Hereward—Watt Slygreen."

What a change swept over the lily face of fair Lucia de Chastelard!

Horror, loathing, misery unspeakable!

She writhed for a time as if she had been touched with fire, then cried, in a tortured voice:

"My good people, go and look for the body of my father in Godiva's Pool. I beheld in the mist the likeness of two men in mortal combat, and one of them was an old man. He was stabbed and cast down into the pool."

Terrified screams burst from the women, for the room was thronged with the servants.

The men muttered savage imprecations upon the murderer of their tyrant lord.

"Some dastardly insurgent!" cried one.

Lucia started, and curled her ashy lip in fierce dissent, but held her peace.

The time had been when she thought her Hereward a demi-god; she counted him an old man's murderer now.

She refused to speak one word more, and the household rushed pell-mell to drag the sullen pool which had no bottom.

A night and a day passed away. The country was searched for traces of the baron's murderer, but who could hope to succeed without a clue?

For Lucia said nothing.

Then they brought in the body of the Baron de Chastelard, which an undercurrent had carried out of Godiva's Pool to the strip of sand under the Tower cliff. They found it when the tide was low.

To the death-room they bore the poor remains, and laid them upon the stately bier which ever stood in the midst of the black, pallid chamber awaiting a lord of the Tower.

Thither went Lucia to see again her father.

She lifted the cloth which shrouded the rigid thing that had once been Vipont de Chastelard.

Yes, the mean, cruel face was smiling in death, and the reptile eyes were peacefully closed.

The marble countenance was august in death which had ever been so abject in life.

The yellow and bloodless hands were pressed upon his breast, where the small child heart was quiet at last, and one was clenched.

The shuddering daughter bent over this ghastly being with a wild light in her eyes.

She furtively glanced at the curious faces which watched her from the doorway; and, averting her face, imperiously waved them away. So they left her alone with the dead.

Then with set teeth, and convulsive shuddering, Lucia de Chastelard seized the clenched fist which lay on the brine-wet bosom, and with a fierce, rending clutch, wrested the fingers apart a little way, and plucked out that thing they had caught at in the death-throe.

Next moment she was hurrying from the death-room with a clenched hand, and her face concealed in her scarf; and the attendants pressed in to perform the last ghastly ministrations to their baron, who would harm no mortal more.

When Lucia had gained her chamber she examined eagerly the article which she had taken from the dead man's hand.

It was naught but a fragment of cloth!

"Ah!" hissed Lucia, recoiling with loathing. "A fragment torn from the murderer's cloak! Beware, Hereward!"

That night L'Ombre gossiped to Cicely that on the day of my lord baron's death M. Hereward had disappeared mysteriously from the village, princess, squire, retainers and all.

When Cicely told her mistress that she cried out, frantically:

"Enough! I see he is guilty of all!" and fell into wildest hysterics.

The day before the baron's interment Captain La Mort returned to the Tower.

He said he had been detained at Rothes by illness, and had only then heard of his dear friend the baron's infamous murder.

Indeed the captain did not look well, but wore a feverish glare in his eyes that made the household quail whenever he looked at any of them.

But when he vowed to have vengeance on the baron's murderer Lucia tottered to her room, and, taking the fragment of cloth from the secret drawer where she had put it, wrapped it carefully up, and hid it in her bosom.

Alas! alas! that love is so hard to kill!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

She is won! They are gone over bank, bush, and

They'll have fleet steeds who follow. Scott.

At four o'clock on the day of the baron's death Hereward was awaiting the return of the ambassador he had despatched to the Tower demanding an interview with the baron.

He had written a brief letter to the effect that should Vipont de Chastelard wish any mercy shown him by the son of Baron Henry Kentigorne, whom he had so foully wronged in times past, and would agree to meet him in peace instead of with his usual treachery, he, Hereward, would, for Miss Chastelard's sake, be content with taking his own and foregoing his just vengeance.

This letter he sent by the hand of Watt Slygreen, and waited impatiently for his return that he might instantly gallop up to the Tower with his numerous followers and oust the usurper. He was accosted by a ragged urchin, with shrewd, twinkling eyes, who whispered to him that he had something to tell him for his own ear only.

When Hereward went aside with the youthful Mercury he heard, to his astonishment, that Hood, the rebel ringleader whom all the men of Kentigorne mourned as dead, was in a fir-wood not half a mile distant, wanting to see Hereward upon private and most important business.

Would Mr. Hereward take a walk out to the wood and see him? Delighted to hear that the poor fellow was still alive and had escaped from Chastelard's toils, Hereward instantly started off with the boy, who left him when within sight of the wood and scurried back towards the village.

Hereward hastened to the spot designated, but found no Hood there. Surprised, as well he might be, he searched about in the vain hope that he had mistaken the place, and hallooed for Hood most energetically, but all to no purpose.

Suddenly it occurred to him that some treachery might be intended by his enemies, and he made the best of his way back to the inn to see what might be happening there.

He met Seyd not far from the inn running towards him with a disturbed manner.

"Hereward, sahib," panted he, "have you seen my mistress?"

"Your mistress!" exclaimed the youth, amazed; "no, I have not."

"Did you send for her?" gasped Seyd, with a scared look.

"Not I indeed. I left her with you," said Hereward, violently startled. "You don't mean to tell me that she has gone away anywhere, do you?"

"Alas! master, we are ruined!" howled Seyd, beating his breast. "A boy came from you to my mistress, telling her you wished her to hasten after you to a grove where you had met a wounded friend called Hood, who needed her attention to his wounds. She

went, sahib, and refused poor Seyd's attendance, for the boy said she must go alone."

"And the boy led her away?" queried Hereward, much disturbed.

"Alas! yes, sahib, and not a minute since I thought I heard a woman scream for help."

"Treachery, by my honour!" cried Hereward, wrathfully. "I have allowed myself to be tricked by an infamous rascal while the girl was being stolen away."

He rushed back to the inn, Seyd following with loud lamentations, and they encountered Watt just riding into the court upon a hack of Jeffreys's.

Poor Coppernose and his comrade Hourri, Hereward's Arab mare, had been confiscated long before, and now graced the baron's stables, to the great disgust of Watt, who only consoled himself by anticipating the touching reunion he and his Coppernose would have when Hereward was lord of the Tower.

"Sorcery and treason! master," cried he as the pair rushed into the court. "What's amiss that your worship foams at the mouth like a bull at a tether-stake? What's old flannel-phiz yelling about? He looks rabid like yon tiger pup I shot out there in Bengal."

Stamping with rage, Hereward communicated the news of Badoura's abduction, and the imposition which had been practised upon himself.

No sooner had he mentioned the boy's agency than Watt's immense eyes dilated to an alarming size, and he bawled out:

"Furies alive! we've all been as prettily bamboozled as ever mice were with toasted cheese! That very same gimlet-eyed imp ran after me as I was riding up the Tower cliff, with a letter which he said was from you, and that it was something important you had forgotten to put in the other letter. So, sure enough, I tucked it in with the other, ass that I was! and gave them both into old Iscariot's hand. Master, I'm sure there's some mystery afloat that we haven't sighted yet. How the wicked prevail!"

"Cease your babbling, you old woman," snapped Hereward, thoroughly roused. "Is this a time for bewailing? Mount, men," he added, turning to his friends; "we must pursue the maiden's captors and give them a taste of true knights' steel."

"A ruse, only a ruse!" sighed Watt. "If you stayed here you'd disappoint them altogether most likely."

"To the dence with your prating!" fired the youth. "If I should die for it I swear no harm shall come to Badoura through negligence of mine!"

"Very right, master, very right," quoth Watt, humbly. "You were always the one to say 'Dilly, dilly, come and kill me' in your good-heartedness to other folks. But I've heard of philanthropists before now that got into the treadmill to feel how the prisoners felt, and when set agoing were told it was set for an hour, and they had to foot it."

Watt bustled about picking out such men as he thought fit to share with him the honour of being his master's escort.

In ten minutes a mounted party was galloping along the road upon which the boy had led the Gentoo maiden away; and they had not ridden a mile when they caught sight of an elfish form darting into the marsh lands that skirted the road.

Giving vent to an unearthly yell, Watt flung himself headlong after him in pursuit, and for a few minutes subsequently nothing was to be seen but the waving tops of the long grass as the wind swept over it.

Then a sharp cry issued from the heart of the snorass, accompanied by a hoarse croak of triumph; and anon Watt emerged, holding up by the back of the neck a peak-faced and sharp-eyed urchin, the hero of the afternoon's cheating.

It did not take long to frighten all he knew out of him, for Watt's threats were truly blood-curdling.

The boy had been picking up faggots in the firewood when a beautiful coach and four came along the road from Rothes and stopped; and a cavalier with a mask on spoke to him.

He offered him three gold pieces for three pieces of service he might do him, the money to be received after the services were rendered.

Then he gave him a letter to run after Watt Slygreen with, a message to give Mr. Hereward, and told him what to say to the Indian lady and where to lead her.

He had led her to the coach, which waited where he had seen it first until she arrived.

Then the gentleman and his servant forced her into the coach, and drove back the way they came at top speed.

Having supplemented the munificent reward of the said cavalier by a good horsewhipping, Watt mounted again, and the cavalcade swept off in full chase.

Thus that day's pursuit commenced and ended unsuccessfully.

They were early out next morning, and posting after the coach, which was made conspicuous by the dark-faced Indian girl and the strange garb she wore, at every inn they passed they renewed their inquiries and heard of the foreign lady.

On dashed the fugitives, and on swept the pursuers with not an hour between them; a day passed, two, three days, and still they were an hour apart!

After the first day's journey, however, they heard no more of the Hindoo maid from the inn people; but they supposed her captor had concealed her, to prevent furnishing a clue to pursuers.

At last they reached London, and lost the travelling coach.

Hereward was beside himself. Watt fumed and consoled alternately.

Poor Seyd's affliction was pitiable.

For one whole day Hereward and his men made every search through London for the hapless maid, and even put up notices on the walls promising an immense reward to any one who should furnish a clue to the girl's concealment.

To these bills was appended the address at which Hereward might be found.

At last an applicant presented herself at Hereward's door.

Watt having opened it, she rushed in and threw herself sobbing and laughing at Hereward's feet.

(To be continued.)

A DARING GAME; OR, NEVA'S THREE LOVERS.

CHAPTER XXV.

LALLY returned to Canterbury in the cab that had brought her out to Sandy Lands, Mrs. Blight's pert little villa in the suburbs, and entered upon the task of obtaining a neat although necessarily scanty wardrobe.

She bought a cheap box, which she had sent to her lodgings, after which she procured another print dress, a gown of black alpaca, and a supply of collars and cuffs; her entire purchases amounted to three pounds ten shillings.

She carried her effects to her attic lodging, the rent of which had been paid in advance, packed her box, and set out again in the cab for Sandy Lands.

It was noon when the vehicle stopped again before the little villa.

The cabman rang the garden bell as before, and when the housemaid appeared he placed Lally's box upon the gravelled walk, received his pay, and departed.

The smart housemaid was as contemptuous as before respecting Lally's humble garments, but spoke to her familiarly as if the two were upon a social level, and conducted her towards the rear porch, saying:

"Missus said you was to be shown up to your room, miss, to make your twit before seeing the children. If you please," added the girl, with increasing familiarity, "I want to know what to call you."

Whatever the social rank of Lally's parents may have been Lally herself was a lady by instinct and education. The housemaid's easy patronage was offensive to her. She answered, quietly:

"You may call me Miss Bird."

"Oh," said the housemaid, with a toss of her head. "This way, Miss Bird."

Lally followed her guide up the stairs to the third and topmost storey, and to a rear room.

"This is the room of the nursery governess," said the offended housemaid. "The room on your right is the school-room. That on the left is the nursery. You are to have your room to yourself, Miss Bird, which I hopes will suit you. There's no petting of governesses in this here establishment. You rises at seven, and eats with the children. You begins lessons at nine o'clock, and keeps 'em up till luncheon, and then comes music, langwidges, and them sort. Dinner in the school-room at five o'clock. Your evenings you has to yourself."

"I shall receive my list of duties from Mrs. Blight," said Lally, pleasantly, "but I am obliged to you all the same."

The housemaid's face softened under Lally's gentleness and sweetness.

"I shouldn't wonder if she was a born lady, after all," the girl thought. "She won't stand putting down, and her face is that sorrowful I pity her."

But she did not give expression to these thoughts. What she did say was this:

"My name's Loizy, and if I can do anything for you just let me know. There's my bell, and I must go. When you get ready come downstairs to missus's boodoor."

She vanished just as the house boy, or Buttons as he was called, appeared with Lally's box. He set this down near the door and also departed. Left alone, Lally examined her new home with a faint thrill of interest.

The floor was bare, with the exception of a strip of loose and threadbare carpet before the low brass bedstead. There was a chintz-covered couch, a chintz-covered easy-chair, a chest of drawers, and a green-shuttered blind at the single window. The room had a dreary aspect, but to Lally it was a haven of refuge.

She locked the door and knelt down and prayed, thanking Heaven that it had been so good to her as to give her a safe shelter and home. Then, rising, she dressed herself as quickly as possible, putting on her black alpaca dress, a spotless linen collar and cuffs, a black sash, and a black ribbon in her hair. Thus attired she descended the stairs, finding the way to the boudoir, at the door of which she knocked.

Mrs. Blight's languid voice bade her enter.

She obeyed, finding her employer still reclining in an armed chair, looking as if she had not moved since Lally's previous visit. She had a book in one hand and a paper-cutter in the other. She recognized Lally with a sort of pleased surprise.

"Ah, back again, and punctual?" she exclaimed, glancing at a toy clock in white and blue enamel on the low mantel-piece. "I had a great many misgivings after you went away, Miss Bird. Five pounds is a good deal of money to one in your position in life, and the world is so full of swindlers. I have already written to the ladies to whom you referred me. I suppose I should have waited for their answer before engaging you, but I am such an impulsive creature that I always do just as I feel at the spur of the moment. My husband calls me 'a child of impulse,' and the words describe me exactly. I'm glad to see you back. I don't know, I'm sure, what I should have said to Mr. Blight if you had decamped, for he does not appreciate my ability to read faces. The time I got taken in with my last cook—the one we found lying with her head in a brass kettle, and the kitchen fire gone out, at the very hour when I had a large company assembled to dine with me—Charles said, 'Fudge, don't let us hear any more about physiognomy.' You see, I engaged the woman because her face was all that could be desired. And since that time Charles won't hear a word about physiognomy."

Lally sat down, obeying a waive of Mrs. Blight's hand. "That 'child of impulse,' silly, garrulous, and puffed up with self importance and vulgarity, pursued her theme until she had exhausted it."

"You are looking very well, Miss Bird," she said, changing the subject, "but all in black—why, you are quite a blackbird, I declare," and she laughed at her own wit. "Are you in mourning? Have you lately lost a friend?"

"Yes, madam," replied Lally, sorrowfully. "I have lately lost the only friend I had in the whole world."

"Oh, indeed. That is sad; but I do hope you won't wear a long face and go moping about the house, frightening the children," said Mrs. Blight, with a candour that was less charming than oppressive to her newly engaged governess. "You must do as the poet so romantically says:—"

"Wear a smile, If he doesn't say just that it's some such thing, and a very pretty sentiment too. And now let us discuss your new duties."

She proceeded to sketch Lally's duties, much as the housemaid had done. Then she gave a history of each one of the five children who were to be under Lally's supervision.

Three of the children were boys, and their fond mother described them as paragons. Her girls also were extraordinary in their mental and physical attractions, "having once been taken at the Zoological Gardens, during a visit to London, by a strange gentleman, for the children of a nobleman!"

"I will accompany you to the nursery, Miss Bird," said the lady, rising. "I desire to introduce you to my darlings. I have great faith in the instincts of children, and I want to see what my children think of you."

Accordingly Mrs. Blight conducted Lally again to the upper floor and to the nursery, which was at the moment of their entrance in a state of wildest confusion and disorder.

The nurse, a stout old woman, and the nursemaid, a red-faced young girl, were in a state of despair, and frantically holding their hands to their ears, while five robust, boisterous, frowny-headed children rode about the room upon chairs, played "tag," and otherwise disported themselves.

The entrance of Mrs. Blight and Lally caused a cessation of the noise. The mother called her children

to her, but they retreated with their fingers in their mouths, looking askance at their new governess.

The three "noble boys" presently set up a loud bellowing, and the two girls who had been "mistaken by a strange gentleman for the children of a nobleman" hid behind their nurses.

It required all the persuasions coupled with threats of Mrs. Blight to induce her shy children to show themselves to Lally. It appeared that they had a horror of governesses, regarding them as tyrants and ogresses created especially to destroy the happiness of children; but Lally's smiles, added to the fact that she looked but little more than a child, finally induced them to be sociable and to approach her.

"In a day or two you won't be able to do anything with them, miss," said the head nurse. "They'll ride rough-shod over you."

"They are so spirited," murmured Mrs. Blight. "Study their characters closely, Miss Bird, and be very tender with them. I have one child more than the queen, and my children are named after the royal family. These three boys are Leopold, Albert Victor, and George. The girls are named Victoria and Alberta. My elder children are at school. Children, this is Miss Bird, your new governess. Now come with her into the school-room. Lessons begin immediately."

The little flock, with Lally at their head, was conducted to the school-room, a large, bare apartment, furnished with two benches, a teacher's chair and desk, and a black-board. Here Mrs. Blight left them, convinced that she had fulfilled her duties as parent and employer, and returned to her book.

Lally proceeded to examine into the acquirements of her pupils, finding them lamentably ignorant. Lessons were given out, but there was no disposition on the part of her pupils to study. They threw paper balls at each other, and altogether proved at the very outset a sore trial to their young teacher. Their shyness lasted for but a brief period, then, having no longer fear of the sad-faced governess, began to romp about the room, to shout, and to engage in a general game of frolics.

Lally had a vein of decision in her character, and with the exercise of a gentle firmness induced her pupils to return to their seats. She explained their lessons to them with an unflinching patience, but the hours of that September afternoon seemed almost endless to her. The children were froward, disobedient, and idle. They had been spoiled by their mother, and were full of mischievous tricks, so that Lally's soul wearied within her.

Dinner, a very plain and frugal one, was served to the governess and the children in the school-room at five o'clock. After dinner Lally's time belonged to herself, and she put on her hat and went out for a walk, having a longing for the fresh air.

This first day at Sandy Lands was a fair type of the days that followed. The children, under Lally's firm but gentle rule, became more quiet and studious, and conceived an affection for their young governess.

Mrs. Blight was delighted with their improvement. She had received a reply from Lally's former employers, giving the young girl very high praise, and was consequently well pleased with herself for securing such valuable services as Lally's at a salary less than half she had ever before paid to a governess.

Mr. Blight was a lawyer in good practice at Canterbury, and spent his days at his office, returning to Sandy Lands to dine, and leaving home immediately after breakfast. He was a small, ferret-eyed man, always in a hurry, a mere money-making machine, with a great ambition to make or acquire a fortune. At present he lived fully up to his income, a fact which gave both him and Mrs. Blight much secret anxiety. With ten children to educate and provide for, several servants to pay, a carriage and pair for Mrs. Blight, and the lawyer's wines, cigars, frequent elaborate dinners to his friends, and other items by no means small to settle, Mr. Blight was continually harassed by debt, yet had not sufficient strength of will to reduce his expenses and live within his income.

One cause, perhaps, of their indiscreet self-indulgence was that they had "expectations."

There was an old lady connected with the family, the widow of a wealthy London banker who had been Mr. Blight's uncle. This old lady was supposed to have no relatives of her own to enrich at her death, and the Blights had lively hopes of inheriting her fifty thousand pounds, which had descended to her absolutely at her husband's death, and of which she was free to dispose as she might choose.

This lady lived in London, at the West End, was very eccentric, very irascible, and went little in society, being quite aged and infirm. She was in the habit of coming down to Sandy Lands annually in September, ostensibly to spend a month with her

late husband's relatives; but she always returned home within a week, alleging that she could not bear the noise of the Blight children, and that a month under the same roof with them would deprive her of life or reason. It was now about the time of this lady's annual visit, and one morning, when Lally had been about two weeks at Sandy Lands, Mrs. Blight came up to the school-room, an open letter in her hand, and dismissing the children to the nursery for a few minutes, said, confidentially:

"Miss Bird, I have just received a letter from the widow of my husband's uncle, a remarkable old lady, with fifty thousand pounds at her own absolute disposal. My husband is naturally the old lady's heir, being her late husband's nephew, and we expect to inherit her property. Her name is Mrs. Wroat."

"An odd name!" murmured Lally.

"And she's as odd as her name," declared Mrs. Blight. "She comes here at this time every year, and always brings a parrot, a lap-dog, a bandbox in a green muslin case, a blue umbrella, and an old maid, who eyes us all as if we had designs on her mistress's life. The absurd old creature is devoted to her mistress, who is a mere bundle of whims and eccentricities. The old lady calls for a cup of coffee at midnight, and she hates our dear children, and she thrashed Leopold with her cane last year because he put nettles in her bed and flour on her best cap, the poor, dear, innocent child! And I never dared to interfere to save Leopold, though his screams rang through the house, and I stood outside her door listening and peeping, for you know we must have her fifty thousand pounds!" and Mrs. Blight's tone was pathetic. "She's a nasty old woman!—there! Of course I say it in confidence, Miss Bird. It would be all up with us if Aunt Wroat were to hear that I said that. She's very tenacious of respect, and all that bother, and insisted I should punish Albert Victor because he called her 'an old curmudgeon.'"

"When do you expect this lady?" asked Lally.

"To-morrow, with her maid, lap-dog, parrot, umbrella and bandbox. She writes that she will stay a month, and that she must have no annoyance from the children, and that she won't have them in her room—the old nuisance! If it wasn't for her money I'd telegraph her to go to Guinea, but as we are situated I can't. I must put up with her ways. And what I want of you, Miss Bird, is to see that the children do not stir off this floor while she is here. Let them die for want of exercise, the poor darlings, rather than we should offend this horrid old woman. If we sacrifice ourselves she can't leave her property to some fusty old charity, that's one comfort."

"I will do my best to keep the children out of Mrs. Wroat's sight," said Lally, gravely.

"You must succeed in doing so, for the old lady says this will probably be her last visit to us, as she is growing more and more infirm, and she hints that it is time to make her will. Everything depends upon her reception on the occasion of this visit. Let her get tiffed with us, and our chance will be gone. I declare I wish I had a place where I could hide the children during her stay. She must not see or hear them, Miss Bird."

"Is there anything more that I can do, Mrs. Blight?"

"Yes; she always has the governess play upon the piano and sing to her in the evening. She is fond of music—deplorably so. We always hire a cottage piano and put it in her sitting-room while she stays, and the governess plays to her there in the evenings. She's very liberal with a governess who can play well. She gave Miss Oddly last year a five-pound note. And always when she leaves us after a visit she hands me twenty pounds and says she never wants to be indebted to anybody, and that's to defray her expenses while here. I have to take it. I wouldn't dare to refuse it."

"I shall be glad to amuse her in any way, Mrs. Blight," declared the young governess. "I shall not mind her eccentricities, and shall remember that she is aged and infirm."

"And that she has fifty thousand pounds, which we must have," said Mrs. Blight. "Don't fail to remember that!"

Much relieved at having guarded against a meeting between her expected guest and her children, Mrs. Blight departed to seek an interview with her cook.

Extensive preparations were made that day for the reception of Mrs. Wroat. Two rooms were prepared for her use, one of them having two beds, one bed being for the maid. A cottage piano was hired and put into one of the rooms. The choicest articles of furniture in the house were arranged for her use. The hint that Mrs. Wroat was thinking of making her will was sufficient to render her time-serving, money-hunting relatives gentle, pliable, and apparently full of tender anxiety for her happiness and comfort.

Mr. Blight was informed of the good news when he came home to dinner, and he sought a personal interview with his children's governess, entreating her as she valued her situation to keep the youngsters out of sight during the visit of Mrs. Wroat.

Everything being thus arranged, it only remained for the guest to arrive.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. and Mrs. Craven Black, summoning the indispensable Mrs. Artress to a private conference, passed some hours in their own room in anxious deliberation upon their future course in regard to Neva. It was necessary to the full success of the daring game they were playing that Neva should marry Rufus Black; but she had rejected him, completely and finally, in obedience to her instincts of duty to Heaven and to herself, and her enemies began to believe that they would have serious trouble in forcing her into the marriage. But they did not falter in their evil determination, and the three plotted and planned until their united villany had formed a scheme which promised them success.

In accordance with the conclusion to which they finally arrived, Mrs. Artress went away from Hawk-hurst that very afternoon in the family brougham, and two trunks belonging to her were conveyed to Canterbury in a spring waggon. It was given out that she was going to London to visit a friend, with whom she would remain until after the return of Mr. and Mrs. Craven Black from Wynde Heights. She really went up to London, but to what point she then directed her wanderings no one knew, and very probably few cared.

Rufus Black wandered disconsolately all day in the park, and came in an hour before dinner, hungry and tired, and with a sullen and hopeless countenance. His father encountered him in the upper hall, and went into his room with him.

"That's a fine face, Rufus," said Craven Black, sneeringly, "to win the heart of a girl like Miss Wynde."

"You have made me what I am," cried Rufus, desperately. "I married a good and innocent young girl, who but for me was utterly friendless in the wide world. You tore me from her. You persuaded me that my marriage was illegal——"

"And wasn't it?"

"I suppose it was, but it was not null and void. It could have been set aside by due process of law, because I was a minor, and because I perjured myself in declaring that I was of age; but I refuse to believe that it was null and void, no marriage at all. I never wronged my poor Lally as you pretend."

"Why this spasm of virtue?" demanded Craven Black, with a cynical smile. "The girl's dead, isn't she?"

"Yes, she's dead! Heaven help me!"

"What a tragic groan! This morning you were in despair because Miss Wynde rejected you. To-night you are mourning after your corn-chandler's daughter. I'd like to understand you—I would indeed. Which are you wailing after, Miss Wynde or Lalla Bookh?"

"Which?" cried Rufus, with wild eyes. "For the girl you and I murdered! It is she whom I mourn! I think of her stark form and open eyes and dead, bruised face, as she must have looked when they brought her upout of the river, and my heart is ready to break within me. She haunts me day and night. In my dreams I seem to feel the touch of her hands on my face—oh, Heaven! I shall never feel them there again! I was a poor, pitiful coward. Yet what could I do? And you and I are Lally's murderers!"

Craven Black shivered involuntarily.

"You act as if you had a touch of the D.T.," he said. "Have you been spending the day in a Canterbury pot-house?"

"No; I have been wandering in the park, trying to forget. You need not fear that I shall get drunk again."

"Your reflections were rather singular for a rejected lover of Miss Wynde," sneered Craven Black. "I thought you loved the heiress?"

"So I do, but not as I loved Lally. If Miss Wynde does not take pity on me I am lost. The love of a good woman would save me from madness and utter despair. In time I might grow to love her as I loved Lally, and in any case I would worship her from very gratitude."

"I am blessed if I can understand you," said Craven Black, his lips curling. "You love a dead woman and a living woman, and mourn one while you wait to marry the other. It is very curious. It's a pity you are not a Mahomedan, so that you could have had both."

"Stop!" cried Rufus, in a tone of command. "Don't speak such words in connection with the names of Lally and Miss Wynde. I want to marry Neva to save myself from going mad——"

"After another woman? Exactly. No wonder Miss Wynde declined the honour with thanks."

"I shall leave here to-morrow," said Rufus.

"You won't do any such thing. You will stay at Hawkhurst for the remainder of the week, and play the lover to Miss Wynde, and sigh like any donkey in her ears, and spout poetry, and touch her heart. 'Faint heart never won fair lady,' says the proverb. Girls often refuse a man the first time he offers, for fear of being held too cheap. Pursue the girl gently, but keep pursuing."

"She says her father wrote her a letter saying he knew me," said Rufus, doggedly. "She asked me about him, and I told her I didn't know Sir Harold."

"You did?" gasped Craven Black.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you have put your foot in it. I knew you were an idiot, but I didn't suppose you had arrived at such a state of idiocy as it appears you have. Didn't I tell you what to say to the girl if she ever spoke of her father?"

"I believe you did, but I couldn't stand there with her eyes on me and utter a deliberate falsehood to her. I understood about the letter. You wrote it."

"Hush! I've a good mind to leave you to yourself, and let you drift into some union," declared Craven Black, angrily. "Such a dolt as you are isn't fit to live. How do you expect the girl to marry you when you yourself put obstacles in the way?"

"See here," said Rufus. "What are you going to make out of my marriage with Neva Wynde?"

"Ten thousand pounds a year, which you are to formally agree to pay me out of her income."

"I thought you had some motive in the matter besides love to me. I'd pay it if she'd marry me. But she won't."

"She will if you choose to be a little bolder. We leave here, my wife, Neva, and myself, next Monday for Wynde Heights. Mrs. Black will use all her influence with Neva during our absence to induce her to accept you, and I am sure she will succeed. You are to hold yourself in readiness to come to us at any moment on receiving my summons."

"Where is Wynde Heights?"

"In Yorkshire."

"Very well. I will come when you notify me. But I don't think going will do any good. Miss Wynde is no coquette, and not apt to change her mind. Besides, she is likely to marry Lord Towyn."

"I think not," said Craven Black, significantly. "She is a minor, and I don't believe she would marry against the wishes of her step-mother."

"The question is if your wife is her step-mother," remarked Rufus, still recklessly. "The probability is that the relationship is worn out by this time, and the sense of duty that Miss Wynde may have felt towards her father's widow will fall short when it comes to be directed towards Craven Black's wife."

"We won't go into details," said his father, coolly. "If you want to marry the girl keep telling her so. There's nothing like persistence."

"Yes; but about that ten thousand pounds a year," said Rufus, thoughtfully. "I don't think it would be right to take any such sum out of her income, and, besides, it might be impossible."

"Leave that to me. As to the right and wrong of it a perjurer is not qualified to judge. Consume yourself to what you can understand. It is time to get ready for dinner, and I advise you to come down with a cheerful face."

With this advice Craven Black went away to his own rooms.

Rufus resolved to act upon his father's advice, and when he went down to dinner with a pale, melancholy face, and baggy eyes, he wore an air of assumed cheerfulness which touched Neva's heart.

That evening he sang with her while she played upon the piano. He quoted poetry to her in the third drawing-room, where they were alone, and afterwards induced her to walk with him in the moonlight upon the terrace.

The next day he was full of delicate attentions to Miss Wynde. She found a bouquet of wood violets at her plate at breakfast, with the dew still upon them, and knew who had procured them for her. He asked to be allowed to accompany her on her morning ride, and Neva assented. After the ride they played chess, gathered bouquets in the conservatory, and, later, walked in the park. Neva was gently courteous to him all the while, but there was a quiet reserve in her manner that forbade him to speak again of love or marriage to her.

The next day Lord Towyn called at Hawkhurst, and Mr. and Mrs. Craven Black received him all that courtesy, and were so politely attentive to him that he could not exchange a word with Neva unheard by them.

The young earl went away, as may be supposed, troubled and annoyed.

On Friday he rode over again from his marine

villa, and was similarly entertained, and again could not see Neva alone.

On Saturday he came to Hawkhurst in the early morning, and learned at the lodge gate that Miss Wynde, attended by her groom, was out for a ride, and that she had gone by the Dingle Farm. His heart bounded within him and he spurred away in eager pursuit.

He traversed the wood and crossed the wide common, and skirted the dangerous chalk pit, and rode up to the old farm gate just as Neva, remounting her horse, came riding out on her return.

The young earl's warm blue eyes flashed a tender radiance upon her, and he raised his hat, his golden hair gleaming in the sunshine, while his noble face glowed with a laughing delight. An answering radiance flashed from Neva's red-brown orbs, and she blushed as she bade him a careless good-morning.

"I came out to meet you," said Lord Towyn as he wheeled his horse and rode at her side. "I have much to say to you."

He glanced over his shoulder, but the discreet groom was hanging back, and with a mental blessing upon the fellow Lord Towyn saw that the field was clear, and that the time had arrived in which to learn his fate.

They rode on for a little while in silence, until they were past the chalk-pit and out upon the breezy common. The groom was out of earshot, and the young earl said, gently:

"Neva, I have been twice to Hawkhurst to receive the answer you promised me, but I could not speak to you alone. I may not find another opportunity than this, as you go with the Blacks to Wynde Heights on Monday. So, although this does not seem a fitting place, I ask you again if you will be my wife? I love you, Neva, with all my heart and soul. If you will trust your happiness to me you will find in me a true lover to the end of our days. Do you think you could be happy with me?"

Neva's pure, proud face flashed hotly, and she bent her head low towards her saddle-bow. Lord Towyn waited for her answer in an almost breathless suspense, but she did not speak until they were in the wood path and out of sight of even the lagging groom.

Then she lifted her head sharply, and turned upon her lover a face as divinely fair and resolute as a June morning, and although she spoke no word he read assent in the dropping eyes, the reddening cheeks, and the proud, tremulous mouth.

He bent towards her in rapture and seized one little gauntleted hand, pressing it to his own.

"It is *Yes, Neva*," he whispered, as if fearing the very birds might hear him. "Oh, my darling, how shall I deserve this great joy?"

He raised her hand to his lips and the contact thrilled his very soul; thus they were betrothed.

The next instant he was again erect in his saddle, and the ecstasy of his glowing face and the unexpressed rapture of his manner, and the tender caressing in his very gaze, proclaimed his great and solemn joy.

"I have a ring, it was my mother's, Neva, and I ask you to wear it as a sign of our engagement to each other," he said. "When I see my mother's ring on your finger I shall feel that you are indeed mine."

He took from his little finger a gold ring set with a single brilliant of great size and splendour. Neva tremblingly removed her gauntlet, and the young earl placed the ring upon that finger which custom has dedicated to the purpose.

"That is the seal of our betrothal," he whispered.

Neva slowly put on her glove.

"Arthur," she said, suddenly, "do you think papa would have approved my marriage with you?"

"I know he would, my darling. It was his wish, as it was my father's, that we should marry."

"If I could only think that he never changed his mind!" sighed the young girl. "I have a letter he wrote me the night before he perished in India, and in this letter he says that he desires me to marry Rufus Black."

The young earl looked surprised, incredulous.

"I have the letter with me," said Neva. "You can read it. In it papa says he desires me to marry this young man, whom he esteems and loves. I have struggled to obey papa's last wishes, but I cannot—I cannot! He was such a good father, Arthur, that I reproach myself continually for my disobedience. I never disobeyed him before, and I seem to see his eyes full of reproach fixed upon me, and to hear his voice—Oh, Arthur! Arthur!"

"Let me see the letter, darling."

Neva extricated it from the folds of her dress, and gave it to him. They halted while he read it. A look of surprise, wonder, and incredulity mantled Lord Towyn's face as he read. It was followed by

a sternness that well became his fair and haughty face.

"I pronounce the letter a forgery," he declared. "May I keep it, Neva, for the present? I desire to show it to Mr. Atkins, who shall give us his opinion on the handwriting."

"Yes; keep it," assented Neva.

Lord Towyn carefully put it in his pocket.

"I pronounce the letter a forgery," he repeated, sternly. "How did it come to you, darling?"

"Lady Wynde gave it to me on my return from France. Papa desired her to retain it for a year. Who would forge such a letter, Arthur?"

"I don't know. I am puzzled. One cannot suspect Lady Wynde, and yet—and yet—I don't know what to think, Neva. I don't believe Sir Harold ever saw Rufus Black."

"Rufus says he never saw papa, or that he never spoke to him," said Neva. "And that remark made me doubt the letter. But Rufus never forged it, Arthur. Rufus is a kind-hearted but weak-willed boy—he is no more. I like him, Arthur, and I know he never wrote that letter. Lady Wynde did not. She is too good for that. It might have been written by Craven Black. I do not like him, and think him quite capable of the forgery, only so many of the words are papa's own that it seems wicked to doubt its authenticity."

"I will prove it a forgery!" cried the young earl. "Sir Harold was incapable of binding your fate in this manner to a man you never saw before it was written. There is some foul conspiracy against you, Neva, but we have outwitted your enemies. I am impatient to have you under my own guardianship. The possibility that you have enemies makes me afraid to trust you from me. Give up this visit to Wynde Heights, darling."

"It is too late, Arthur. We shall stay there but a fortnight, and I have promised to go. Papa bade me love his wife and obey her, and though she no longer bears his name, and I no longer owe her obedience, yet I have given my word to go up to Yorkshire with her, and must keep my promise."

"But when you return, Neva, you will marry me? Do not condemn me to a long probation. Let us be married quietly some morning at the Wyndham church, after due intimation to our friends. Shall it not be so?"

Neva yielded a shy assent.

"We will be married a month hence, Neva?" whispered the ardent young lover.

"Two months," said Neva, smiling. "I must not be too lightly won, Lord Towyn. Besides, I must have the orthodox trousseau. I will tell Mrs. Black of our engagement when I am with her at Wynde Heights. Rufus is not going with us, nor is Arthur."

They had threaded the wood and come out upon the highway long since while they were talking, and were now within sight of Hawkhurst. Rufus Black was riding through of the great gates on his way to meet Neva.

The little title of the young pair was over for the morning, and recognizing the fact and not wishing to proclaim his happy secret to his defeated rival, Lord Towyn made his adieu to Neva, begging her to write to him daily from Yorkshire, which she promised to do, then, raising his hat to Rufus Black, the young earl spurred his horse and rode swiftly or towards Wyndham.

Neva returned home with Rufus.

On Monday morning Mr. and Mrs. Craven Black, accompanied by Miss Wynde, departed for Wynde Heights.

On Wednesday Lord Towyn looked for a letter from his young betrothed. None came. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday went by, and still there came no letter from Neva announcing her safe arrival in Yorkshire.

The young earl wrote every day, his uneasiness increasing as the time passed. He communicated his alarm to Sir John Freise and Mr. Atkins, and they telegraphed to the clergyman of the little town in whose vicinity Wynde Heights was situated, begging him to call and see if Miss Wynde was in good health.

The answer to this despatch came promptly, and also by telegraph. It was to this effect:

"Sir John Freise and Mr. Atkins: Wynde Heights is untenanted, save by the housekeeper, Miss Wynde has not been here, nor have Mr. and Mrs. Black."

On receipt of this astounding message the young earl posted up to town, as did Sir John Freise and Mr. Atkins. They searched for the missing heiress and her guardians, but their search was futile. Not a trace of her could be found. She had come up to London with her enemies, but no further clue to her could be found. She had completely disappeared, and her fate was shrouded in dark and horrible mystery!

(To be continued.)



[NOT DEAD YET.]

FRANK MILLARD'S MISTAKE.

FRANK MILLARD, twenty-five years old, and endowed with the usual allowance of masculine common sense, had fallen in love with a photographic likeness.

He was with a surveying party in the interests of a projected railroad, spending days and nights between grass and sky. He ate his beans and pork, wore coloured flannel shirts, tramped his over so many miles a day, and was perfectly content with the Arcadian side of life.

One day some one came from the nearest town with the infrequent mail, and among his letters was one from his sister Katherine, which ran as follows:

"As I can't see you face to face, you dear old fellow, I send you this duplicate. It doesn't express the glories of a new summer bonnet, but then no mere black and white could, you know."

A card picture had fallen out of the sheet. He picked it up now and looked at it. He saw the loveliest face, he thought, that had ever come before his eyes; and it was no more a picture of Bonnie Kate than of himself.

There was not another word in the letter about it. Probably it had been enclosed by mistake. He put it into his pocket and carried it about with him through all his days' tramps, meanwhile considering what he should do respecting it.

If he should ask who the original was he might have to give it up. If Kate did not find out her mistake and demand its return he would keep it, and when he returned to civilisation would find the living woman if the world held her and there were not a superfluous husband already existing.

It was a fortnight before he had an opportunity to send to the post-office, then he answered Kate's epistle with a very indefinite mention of the photograph. He thanked her for the picture she had enclosed, and was delighted with it; that was all.

The weeks grew months, and the hot, dry summer burned itself away. Living his wild, out-of-door life, Frank Millard grew brown and bearded and strong sinewed. Everywhere with him went the nameless photograph. He knew every line of it by heart, but he did not realize how much a part of his life the fancy had grown.

In October he left flannel shirts and semi-barbarism and went back to broadcloth and civilization. Kate met him with a great gush of tears and laughter, for the big, handsome fellow was the light of her eyes. She took him about everywhere, as proud of him as if he had been her lover.

A week went by, and he had not mentioned the picture. Every woman he met underwent one searching look.

One rainy day Kate was holding a grand review of all her possessions. Among the rest was an old photograph album. Frank turned the leaves lazily over, still with a vague hope that among the contents might be the face he sought. He found it.

The picture was small, old, poorly executed—years younger apparently than the one he had, but he knew the eyes and mouth.

He turned back to the beginning, deceitfully indifferent.

"Where did you get this, Kate?"

"That old thing? I've had it centuries."

"Anybody here I know? Come and tell me who people are."

She obeyed. At last they came to the one.

"Dora Wilmer. A caricature. She is such a beauty. I had a lovely picture of her, and somehow I've lost or mislaid it."

He looked at it for a half-minute.

"Yes, she is pretty," he said, and went on to the end of the book, in which he had as much interest now as in an old almanac.

Of course there were a score of questions which he wanted to ask, and might have done without

committing himself in the least; but he was too shy and too self-consciously guilty.

Only a day or two afterwards he met a friend in the street. The friend was in a hurry—going to the station to meet a cousin.

"Miss Wilmer—Dora. You've never met her? One of the prettiest girls in England."

Millard expressed directly a great deal of interest in the fact.

"She is a great friend of your sister's. You'll probably see her. I must go."

So he went, and Millard followed him unseen.

He watched the station from the windows of an opposite shop, saw Browne come out leading—almost carrying, in fact—a lady. She was limping in a way that betrayed some shocking injury or deformity. He could not see her face—her veil was down. Her escort lifted her into the waiting carriage, and Millard stood feeling as if some one had struck him.

He was a slave to his eyes. Fastidious to excess, he could not help feeling a shock in discovering that that exquisite face belonged to a cripple. If he had known it at the first he might have schooled himself into endurance. But seeing it all at once, and without the least warning, the dreadful, halting awkwardness was more than he could bear.

He went home and told his sister that Tom Browne's cousin had come.

"Poor Dora," Kate said, pityingly. "I half dread meeting her. She has been very unfortunate since I saw her last."

Then some one coming in prevented a explanation, and Frank did not recur to the subject.

He went about for a day or two in a dismal dream. Then Kate announced, radiant, that Dora was coming to spend a week with her.

He went out and reasoned with himself. The result of it was that he sent a note to the house announcing his sudden departure for London.

He was not altogether a coward in the resolution to which he had come. He told himself that there was no want of chivalry in what he was doing. He knew nothing about the lady but that she had a lovely face. He might fall in love with her or not. She might not be free. She knew nothing about him. He put himself simply beyond the chance of pain. He never could marry a woman who was a hopeless cripple. So if he removed himself out of the way of possible entanglement there was not one word to be said.

When he arrived in London there really was business which would have summoned him very shortly. He plunged into it, and it was six weeks before he came home again. Then Miss Wilmer had gone. The picture was safe under lock and key. He had not looked at it since his sudden departure for town.

He found the household still absorbed in admiration of the departed guest. In all that was said of her, however, there seemed just a shadow of reticence, as if something was kept back. If Frank had not seen her he perhaps would never have noticed the matter. Her lameness was never alluded to, but Kate, the shadow coming over her face, spoke briefly once or twice of her friend's misfortune. But she did not specify its nature, and he asked no questions.

A fortnight later Kate read through a letter, and at the end of the last page burst into tears.

"Frank, I can't help it—Dora's engaged."

"Shocking! Will all her friends weep?"

"And to Tom Browne."

"Well, Tom's a good fellow. But I thought he was her cousin."

"About as much as you are. Her mother was his stepfather's sister."

"A little less than kin." I don't see what you're crying for, Kate."

"Of course you don't. Men never see anything till it breaks their stupid heads."

"Oh, if you are going to display temper I'm off," he said, and, gathering up his newspapers, he went off.

It was nothing to him, certainly, and yet he somehow was conscious of a stunned feeling—a half-smothered pain. He did not feel willing to talk; solitude seemed best to him just then.

Tom Browne repeated the news a day or two later. Millard was in Browne's office, after hours, and the two were smoking. Millard sucked a little harder at his cigar when he heard it, and waited for a minute before he answered.

"Do you know, Tom, I always fancied you a little in love with Edith Sybell?"

"Did you?" Tom replied, a harsh laugh grating over his words. "You never fancied Edith Sybell in love with me, I suppose?"

"I never saw you much together, you know. Wasn't she?"

"Miss Sybell is an accomplished flirt. And yet—well—Dora is worth a hundred of her."

Millard turned and looked keenly into his friend's

face. His cigar was going out between his fingers, his eyes were wistful and dreamy, and there was almost a quiver about his lips.

"It isn't anything you can reason yourself out of or into. Why did you ask her to marry you?"

"Because—and if you ever breathe a word of this to anybody else, or refer to it again to me, I'll shoot you, by the powers—Edith had jilted me. Dora's father—a precious rascal, and her brother, another one—had together cheated the girl out of every pound her mother had left her. Then they both died—which they ought to have done five years ago. She came here to find a place to earn her living. There was only the choice between that and charity. The idea of that helpless child working for her bread! I had always been half in love with her. What else would any man have done? Only, I'll swear that the man don't live who is half good enough for her."

A cripple and penniless, and engaged to Tom Browne because she must marry or work! Doubly it was nothing to him now. He walked up and down the street in the gathering dusk, and struggled with a something unnamed, and with no standing-ground of will to fall back upon. He did not know what was the matter—he could not tell what he wanted.

A little while afterwards he met Miss Sybell at a party. She was a tiny bit of a blonde, graceful, sweet, childish, and very artful. If she had a heart it very rarely betrayed itself. She was a picture of exquisite dressing. She wore something green, silky, and floating, and had wheat ears and oaks and poppies in her hair. Millard watched her for a few minutes. Then he went up and claimed an old acquaintance.

She graciously remembered him at once.

"Of course I haven't forgotten you. Such a son of Anak as you doesn't easily slip out of one's memory."

"Miss Sybell! Are you going to scoff at my inches?"

"Not in the least. Only you are a kind of Triton among all these minnows. And, oh, dear, there comes the very minnowest of them all after this next waltz."

"It is promised to me, you know it is. Shall we go?" he inquired.

Just as the aspiring minnow reached the place where he had seen the beauty through the little crowd about her she and Millard slipped into the circles of the waltz.

Millard began that night with the determination of winning Miss Sybell if he could get her. I think he felt the necessity of active measures for himself. The lady's reputation as a destroyer of men's peace of mind was very wide. He was so sure of himself that he felt as if he had all to gain and nothing to lose.

Before the evening was over he wondered what there was in the girl that should attract men's heads. She was exquisitely pretty—her manners simple as a child's. She had not one atom of self-assertion or apparent self-consciousness about her. She was as far removed from any visible pretension to bullship as any woman that ever lived.

Yet one man had shot himself—it was only a flesh wound, and he didn't die—and two more were doing Continental penance, because one day she had opened her blue eyes very wide and assured each in turn that she was "so surprised and so grieved, and mightn't they be friends?" etc., etc. If the three had compared notes there would have been wonderful revelations.

Kate liked her. She was sunny-tempered and sweet.

The two girls were much together after a while. It was enough for Kate that Frank fancied Miss Sybell. She would have found something to admire in her if she had been Hecate.

The winter festivities wore on. It was very gay. There was a great deal done in the way of ball and party going. Millard's attentions intensified themselves. Other aspirants for favour complained that he had the advantage, and watched with eager eyes for the day when he should withdraw crestfallen. That fate seemed to be the common lot of all. There was no reason that he should be an exception.

Browne and Millard seldom met. It is not to be supposed that Browne was ignorant of what his friend was about, but there was nothing to be done in the matter.

One night there had been a ball at an adjacent town. The dancing had been kept up till a very late hour, everybody was tired out when the homeward ride began. The night was perfect. A full moon shone white and serene overhead; the road was hard and smooth as a floor.

Miss Sybell was with Millard on the back seat of a mail phaeton; another couple occupied the front seat. There was a little drowsy talk at the start, then silence fell on the four. Millard made some remark after a while, and his companion returned no reply. He bent over and looked into her face. She was fast asleep, nestled down among her furs.

He drew her a little closer to his side, gathered the robes more snugly about her, called to his companions to attest that he had not been the first of the party to succumb, then almost fell asleep himself.

He did not wholly lose consciousness. He barely missed the white moonlight and the flying ghostly fields beside them. But something in the magnetism of the near presence, perhaps, made him start wide awake from a dream that he had offered his hand to Edith Sybell and she had accepted it. It was so real that the word seemed still on his lips. But the girl slept still; the others evidently had not been the hearers of a proposal.

Her hand had fallen out of her muff. It was ungloved, and lay white against the dark fur. A sudden impulse seized him. He slipped from his own hand a great, awkward noticeable cluster of diamonds, and slid it softly over her forefinger. She stirred a little, put her hand back into her muff, and was fast asleep again in a half-minute. Nobody but himself had seen the action.

She did not wake till they stopped at her own door. "I'm afraid I've been very rude," she faltered.

"Quiet as a lamb," the other girl said, with a laugh. "For once you were out of mischief, Edith." Millard did not speak, but lifted her out and assisted her up the steps.

"I shall call and hear you say that you are—not sorry to-morrow," he whispered.

Miss Sybell said good-night still drowsily, and the door banged shut, and left him with a queer sense of some sort of impending fate at hand.

After Millard was left at his own door the other two discussed the matter, as, being committed themselves, they had a right to do.

"She had Millard's ring on her hand."

"She hadn't when we started."

"I should like to know when the matter was arranged, then. There wasn't a dozen words spoken after we started."

Feminine curiosity was too much for the young lady. She made a morning call at Miss Sybell's home the next day, at the earliest possible minute. Edith had slept late, and was still busy with a tardy toilet. The visitor was on such terms of intimacy that she went up to her friend's room.

One glance at Miss Sybell's hands showed them guiltless of the Millard diamonds, or any other jewel. The ornaments she had worn the night before lay in a sparkling heap on her dressing-table. The visitor invented an errand to cross the room, and satisfied herself that the ring was with the others. Soon afterwards she said, smoothly:

"Why don't you tell me, Edith, if I am to congratulate you?"

"Congratulate me?"

"You wore Mr. Millard's ring last night. I thought, of course, it was all settled."

"And you really thought that one of the parties interested would betray state secrets? How much diplomacy you have yet to learn."

The broad dropped lids, the flickering colour in her cheeks, the smile that set all the dimples quivering about her lips meant—anything. The questioner saw she was not to know, and glided smoothly to something else.

"You have heard of Mr. Browne's engagement? Miss Wilmer, you know. I did think, Edith, that he was one of your devoted slaves."

"Mr. Browne? No indeed. I've seen very little of him these six weeks."

But when the inquiring spirit had departed Miss Sybell sat very still and thoughtful. Browne had told the truth; she had coquetted with him, had jilted him, and in her heart had meant all the while to marry him at last. Of all the men who had sighed for her he was the only one to whom she had ever given a second thought. Now he had left her for ever.

It was so thoroughly a part of her nature to treat men in such a manner that there was nothing of the melodramatic impulse of revenge in her sensations of the next half-hour. She was piqued, of course, but under that feeling was a vague dullness; and something active must be done.

The thought of marrying Millard had not once seriously occurred to her an hour before. Now his whispered words came back to her. If he came again and asked he should have his answer.

About her possession of the ring she did not for a moment wonder. She thought:

"He put it on my hand when I was asleep, of course—like a man's stupid devices—thinking he would commit me before those others."

The day settled down into rain as the morning wore on. Miss Sybell, carefully dressed in most elaborately simple home guise, the rose red deep in her cheeks, her blue eyes wide and bright, waited for Frank Millard's call. It was the hardest day she had ever known in her life. She tired herself out in a dozen ways, and still he did not come.

It is not to be supposed that the day was altogether destitute of trial for him. He was hindered in a dozen different ways, so that the evening had begun when he made his way to Miss Sybell's home.

The young lady was alone in the shine of the fire-light in the pleasant family parlour. She rose in a little flutter quite unusual to her, which put him on his balance at once. She gave him her hand in greeting—the other, the left hand, lay among the folds of her dress at her side. He took that too after an instant, bending his head low to scrutinize it in the uncertain gleam.

"You would not wear my ring?" he said, and there really was just enough mortified disappointment in his heart to be effective in his voice.

"Mr. Millard, you never asked me."

"Miss Sybell, you were asleep, and did not give me the chance. What more could a man do? Did you wish me to give your friend on the front seat the benefit of my tender speeches and your repudiation of them? For a young woman who could go to sleep under such circumstances would be capable of anything inhuman."

Miss Sybell stood aghast. It was a new experience. Other men had wooed with stammerings and tremblings. This man rattled on as if proposals were an every-day occurrence in his life. It was something so entirely out of the ordinary course that she lost her self-command at once.

He stood holding her hands, looking down into her face. He saw the surprise, the indecision, the half-aversion thereon. His voice sank a tone or two into a key sweet and deep and tender as he said:

"Edith, will you wear my ugly ring till I can supply its place with a more suitable one?"

Still she did not speak. He caught the glitter of the stones among the trifles on her watch-chain. With steady fingers he detached it from the clasp, and she stood watching him with a tremor in every nerve.

"Now, dear," he said, quietly, yet as if there was no doubt about her answer.

With face turned she gave him her hand, felt the jewel slide to its place, knew that it was all over, then dropped her face into her hands and cried.

There was a little more commonplace, sensible talk with the others of the family when they came in, after which Frank Millard went home an engaged man.

There was no particular reason why the matter should not be talked about. It was known very soon by everybody who took the slightest interest in the affair. The ring was too conspicuous an ornament to escape notice. Miss Sybell would wear no other, so everybody who ran might read.

Millard rather dreaded broaching the matter to his friend, but Browne himself introduced it when they were together.

So you and Miss Sybell have come to an understanding?"

"So it appears."

"You have my congratulations."

"Thanks."

Then they sat and puffed silently at their cigars for a while; then Frank remembered that he had an engagement, and took himself off; and after that the two men met very seldom.

Millard's business took him to London shortly after. He was gone a fortnight. On the day of his promised return he was delayed, and did not reach home till evening. Then he found a note from Kate requesting that he would follow her to the house of a friend, where a party was in progress. Late as it was he dressed and went.

There was an enormous crowd, and dancing in the midst of it. He found Miss Sybell, prettier than ever in a mist of tender blue, and they two went whirling down the saloon to the music of a Strauss waltz. Stopping for breath after a circuit or two, a couple floated by them, the lady apparently finding the music and motion happiness enough. Millard gave a little start at the sight of her face, concluded he was mistaken—he had had but a glance—and relapsed into common sense.

Then somebody came up to claim Miss Sybell for the next dance. Millard glanced at her card. It was full to the very end.

"You see I didn't know you were coming," she said, deprecatingly.

"I'm not Bluebeard, Edith. Don't break those young men's hearts, for you are to let me find you at supper, you know."

Then Kate came.

"Have you seen Dora, Frank? I want you to see her waltz."

"Dora?" he echoed, in blank stupefaction.

"Dora Wilmer; Tom Browne's divinity. There she is. Come and be introduced."

"Wait a minute. Kate, I thought she was lame."

"Lame! No such a thing. She is the best dancer in the house. How did you get such a notion?"

But he did not answer her, and in a minute or two more the presentation was over, and he was face to face with the original of the picture which had been his inspiration during the summer.

He felt the old fascination coming back on him. Every turn of her head, every tone of her voice, was absolute perfection in his eyes. He was dimly conscious that he was silent, awkward, and apparently uninterested. After a little while he had the good sense to get himself away. He found Edith, made her break various promises, devoted himself to her with an intensity that amazed her, and felt as if the evening was ten centuries long.

That night, reaching home somewhat later than the others, he saw a gleam of light under the door of the family sitting-room. Going in, he found, hovering over the register, Kate and Miss Wilmer. It broke in then on his dull comprehension that she was staying in the house.

The next day he escorted Miss Sybell to a neighbouring town, where she was to spend a fortnight. In the same train was Tom Browne, going on to London.

So you see fate left the field clear for what might follow. I do not think that Millard had any very definite thought or intention about his own course of action. It did not occur to him that he was in any worse position than a great many other men. He had fallen in love with a shadow, and somebody else had appropriated the substance. As far as he knew, Browne was indulging in active anathemas over his, Millard's, share in the state of things. He was not yet in an advanced state of misery. That would come afterwards.

He came home again, and for a week Miss Wilmer was before his waking eyes and in his sleeping fancies most hours out of the twenty-four. He wrote to Edith every day, and she replied—dainty little notes with nothing in them. But he was honest in his endeavours to keep his allegiance unshaken, and he really did think he had succeeded as well as conscience could require.

That mystery of Miss Wilmer's lameness explained itself one day. He would not have asked a question if he had never known. She and Kate were gossiping over some absorbing feminine nonsense, and he was busy with the morning's paper.

"I nearly broke my neck, Kate. The heel of my boot caught in something loose, and I fell forward on the platform. Somebody picked me up and I tried to stand. One of those absurd heels—the real French inch-and-a-half kind, you know—had come off. Tom came up just then and I pulled my veil down, and somehow he got me out to the carriage. He must have been awfully ashamed of me, I limped and staggered and made a perfect sight of myself."

Frank went on with his column with a very indefinite idea of what it was all about. He had behaved like an idiot, and now he was getting his reward. Then he went off and wrote Miss Sybell his daily epistle, and wondered what had happened to him that his future looked so hopelessly dead and flat.

Browne came home that night. Frank happened to be an eye-witness of the meeting between him and Miss Wilmer. It was just in the charmed twilight between day and dark. She came forward in her cordial, gracious way, putting out her hands to him, and Millard turned away with a groan.

Then Edith came home, and the four were in pairs again. Tom was in the house at least once in every twenty-four hours. Frank tried to absorb himself in Edith's interests, and found the matter not easy. They were the very best of friends, they never bored their friends or each other with sentiment, they had no quarrels, there were no rhapsodies and no despair. Edith Sybell was not a girl to repulse over any step she once took. Besides, she had a part to sustain. There were enough envious female eyes watching her. Frank Millard was rather a desirable "catch," in the slang of the prize hunters; in addition to which a few men would not have been sorry to have had visible evidence that she had blundered at last and regretted the mistake. But the serene face was the very picture of content, and it did seem that for once all adages and prophecies were coming to naught.

One night it happened that she and Frank were spending a whole long evening together. They had come to a silence, having discussed a great many things near and remote. Miss Sybell, looking up suddenly from some dainty lace work with which her fingers were busy, caught his eyes on her face with a look in them which was new to her.

"Well?" she said, with a smile on her lips, yet with a sort of incisive directness in her tone.

"I was wondering, Edith, what made you promise to marry me."

"Primarily, because you asked me."

"Yes, but do you love me?"

I suppose it was the first time he had ever asked her the question in so many words. She looked up in his face with eyes that seemed to flash blue gleams.

"Do you love me? You see I feel savagely like telling the truth, and hearing it, to-night."

He stared at her in mute wonder. It was altogether a new tone from her lips. What was he to say? He parried her thrust.

"Should I have asked you if I hadn't?"

"Men have done such things, and then—Miss Wilmer was not in town."

He started a little under that—it was dangerously near a very tender place. He did an unmanly thing with the minute's impulse of retaliation, and retorted:

"But she was engaged to Tom Browne."

He had the satisfaction of seeing his lady love in a rage. Her lips were white and set like steel, and her eyes lightened. It was only for a minute. She came out of it, having learned the lesson of self-control, and not by the usual road of hysterics.

"I don't see that either has much to gain in reproaching the other. We are not so hopelessly tied that there is no release."

"Do you want your freedom, Edith?"

"Do you want yours, Frank?"

Then there was silence, and Millard broke it with a laugh which had just the least suspicion of bitterness in it.

"I think we are very near quarrelling. I'm coming there to kiss and make it up," he said, raising his lazy length slowly, and Miss Sybell condescending to accept his peace-offering.

That very night Miss Wilmer and Browne came as near a disastrous conclusion as the others. They had been at a concert, and had come home very much bored. They were sitting before the fire in one of those meditative pauses which belong to a warm room after a chilly walk. Miss Wilmer looked up suddenly and said:

"Tom, do you sometimes get tired of me?"

"Because you get tired of me?" he asked by way of response.

"I don't know whether it's of you or of myself," she replied, with a wistful smile that redeemed her words.

"You poor child, shall I say good-night?"

"Not yet, please. Tom, what made you ask me to marry you?"

He did not speak for a minute. She answered herself.

"Because I was poor, and you would not let me work. You are the dearest, best friend a girl ever had, and I'm an ingrate."

"I suppose you know that you are abusing my future wife, young woman, and that's a sort of thing I don't allow."

"I can't help it, Tom. I am ungrateful to let you sacrifice yourself when you love another woman better than me."

"But she's engaged to somebody else."

The words said themselves. No amount of protestation could recall them.

Miss Wilmer grew a little paler.

"I know," she said, gently. "I had written to release you, the letter was all ready for the mail, then Kate wrote telling me of her brother's engagement. I don't know why I hesitated then. Perhaps I fancied you did not care for her. It was very weak."

"Dora," was the reply—he was by her side, leaning over her chair. "If I had to choose between you and Edith Sybell this hour, I would not alter our relations."

I suppose he thought he meant it. She smiled, somewhat disbelievingly.

"You won't be tried, I think. Frank and Edith are too devoted. But I'm going to ask a year for reconsideration. I'll go home and teach music. It will not hurt me the least that ever was. If you haven't changed your mind, nor I mine then, you can ask me again, you know."

She was so perfectly sensible and placid that with her heroics were out of place. She had had no idea when the talk began that it would end in such a change in her affairs. When he had kissed her and had gone, and she sat down to face what she had done, she was not sorry, though she cried a little.

She accepted Kate's invitation for another month. When Frank heard it he ground his teeth. What was the use of trying to keep faith with himself? If Miss Wilmer had once guessed what was in his heart she would not have lingered another day. But he had kept up appearances bravely.

You may fancy what that month was to him. He went about his daily business with a steady struggle against himself. It was the one case in ten thousand—love at first sight, and in earnest. A more manly man never drew breath; but when a man's heart is tugging against his will, and all his nerves and senses are joining in the rebellion, it is apt to be a hard fight. Her face seemed to him the perfection of loveliness. She sang, and her voice had tones in it that thrilled him. She had a fashion of wearing flowers, tuberoses or violets, always something with

penetrating, clinging odours. It seemed to him that the ghosts of association would haunt him for ever.

And she, liking him first for Kate's sake, then for his own, kept the fact of his engagement so constantly before her eyes that the thought of any fancy for herself never came into her mind. He certainly gave no ground for any. He was with Miss Sybell constantly. If that young lady did not altogether approve of Miss Wilmer's protracted stay in her lover's home she did not betray her disapproval by a word. The almost disagreement of that night had never been alluded to.

When a man gets to Frank Millard's state of mind there is apt to be a change in the current of affairs. Circumstances help him out or in, and change of any sort is a relief.

One evening, just before her departure for her own home, Dora came into the room where he was half reclining in a great easy-chair beside the grate. She was so much a part of the household now that he apparently paid no more attention to her entrance than if she had been Kate. She went and stood beside the hearth, the shine of the fire showing her face in every change. She was thinking very intently about something—a long way off, to all seeming.

He spoke at last.

"Miss Dora, if a man has asked a woman to marry him and finds that his heart is somewhere else, what is he to do with himself?"

I give you my word that when she answered she was thinking only of the just-ended engagement between Browne and herself. She had been getting up quite a little glow of admiration for that individual. There was a little throb in her voice.

"Ask freedom for himself and give it to the lady. If she has common sense she will feel that there is less insult in that than in the other."

"Will you come here?"

He was standing now a step away from her. She obeyed his voice—it was the instinct of obedience. She did not reason.

He had her in his arms in an instant.

"You must not—you must not. Oh, Frank, Frank! Let me go!"

She called him by the name Kate used, struggling in his hold. He released her suddenly, standing quite still. She made her way to the door, sobe that she would not give way to choking and strangling her.

When her hand was on the fastening of the door he called her.

"Dora, will you come back a moment?"

She hesitated—turned—went back. Then she broke down and cried, her head against his shoulder.

He did not move a muscle. She turned away at last and left him.

Then he did a thing of which he is more ashamed in remembering than I am in telling. He went up to his room, wrote a letter to Edith Sybell, telling her what he had done, and protesting that there was no way out but the way he proposed taking, and—shot himself.

Usually if a man is determined to betray his want of sense in that direction the fates do not hinder him. But weak and wicked and unutterably silly as he was, the "divinity that shapes our ends" saved him from a suicide's death.

The smothered pistol shot roused the house. They found him face downward on the floor, a red line across his forehead where the ball had grazed it; otherwise as well as ever, only stunned and insensible.

A frightened servant saw the letter on the table addressed to Miss Sybell. An incoherent question received as incoherent an answer, which was taken for permission to summon her. Fifteen minutes afterwards she was in the room where Frank Millard in his sober senses was wishing himself back to the old surveyor's life.

Nobody had had sufficient sense to remove the letter. It lay in open sight, and she, of course, appropriated it at once. In two minutes she knew its contents; then Frank opened his eyes and saw her, and more than ever wished for solitude.

Something must be said or done. She could not stand there for ever holding that miserable letter. She crushed it up in her hand and turned towards the door.

"Edith," he said, feebly.

She came back and stood by his side. He did not know her well enough to see that she was on the edge of a storm. Revolution had come. After all, perhaps, it was she whom he loved. Then he was moved to prove himself still farther an idiot.

"Do you love me?" he asked, wistfully.

"No," was the sharp, short, and explosive reply.

"Are you going to die?"

"I wish I were."

"So do I, sincerely. You might at least have taken some other day than this for making me ridiculous. I should try and act a little less like a coward if I were six feet high."

Illogical and hysterical she was. But the climax was probably suggested by the helpless length at her feet. He was still lying on the floor, with a pillow under his head, and Kate's strips of sticking plaster across his face.

"Frank Millard, you never cared for me. I have known it as well for two months as I know it now. But I shall not break my heart. You have acted in a way that the weakest woman on the face of the earth would be ashamed of;" and so on, and so on.

"Words, words, words," and very bitter ones they were, and with a certain degree of sameness in them. Millard shut his eyes and groaned.

The door was flung wide open, and Browne stood on the threshold pale and breathless. Miss Sybell stopped at sight of him, wavered, and ended the programme with tears and sobs.

"What is it, old fellow? The servant said you were shot. Anything serious?"

By that time the disturbance in the social atmosphere began to make itself felt. Miss Sybell was grieving bitterly. He essayed to comfort her.

"Don't speak to me. Read that," she cried, thrusting Frank's letter into his hand. In her sober senses she would never have done it.

He read it, and—laughed.

"Much ado about nothing. Frank, you rascal, don't lie there shamming. Get up, and I'll have a shot at you myself. My hand won't shake. Miss Sybell, will you allow me to offer myself as a substitute for this recreant? Dora, mayn't I?"

They settled it afterwards decorously. The world was puzzled up to the last minute, never being able to settle who was whose lover. It was a double wedding, but to this day Frank Millard has no heart to talk or think of pistol practice, and he and Mrs. Tom Browne are never quite at ease in each other's society. K. R.

FAETIÆ.

"MR. JONES," said Mrs. Jones, with an air of triumph, "don't you think marriage is a means of grace?" "Well, yes," growled Jones; "I suppose anything is a means of grace that breaks down pride and leads to repentance."

THE RETORT COURTEOUS.

A conceited young parson once said: "This morning I preached to a congregation of donkeys!"

"I thought so," retorted the lady, "when you called them your beloved brethren!"

NOT "RIGHT ABOUT-MARCH!"—March scarcely is verifying the proverb of "coming in like a lion and going out like a lamb." The lion, at any rate, was too fond of turning on his main, and the lamb's fleece is objectionably snowy. Cold lamb is all very well, but a little later on in the season.—Punch.

DISAPPOINTED EXPECTATIONS.

Expectant Heir: "Doctor, do you think my poor uncle will live the night through?"

Doctor: "Should his disease take a turn he may survive for many years."

E. H.: "Poor uncle! I felt so sorry; I thought he was dangerous!"

FOR BACHELORS THINKING OF MARRIAGE.

Mrs. Jones: "Oh, Malcolm, look! That's the very Mrs. Brown we met at the Robinsons' last week! I should like to sink into the earth!"

Mr. Jones: "Why, dearest? Why?"

Mrs. Jones: "Oh, Malcolm, just think! I wore the same dress I've got on to-night!"—Punch.

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING.

Old Gent to Boy: "Did you ever fight in the wrong?"

Boy: "Often."

Gent: "Dear me, why?"

Boy: "Didn't know until I got the worst of it that I had got hold of the wrong fellow!"—Fun.

DUCKS.

An American paper tells us:

All the women of the villages on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico are in the habit of swimming. This is the sort of girl to marry. Instead of getting a fellow over eyes and ears in debt by her extravagance, the darling would assist her husband in keeping his head above water.—Fun.

DUTY AND PLEASURE.

Paral Butler (deferentially): "And what do you think of our country quality down here, sir?"

Town Gentleman ("in waiting" to Lord Marybone, who was visiting the Squire): "Well, I course, you see, Smithers, I don't mind waitin' on 'em,—but—can't say I should care to sit down with 'em!"—Punch.

NO MISTAKE!—At the Surrey Sessions a man has been found guilty of stealing the carcass of a pig.

He went into a pork shop and while the owner's back was turned bolted with the pig. His defence was that he was drunk and took the pig for a lark. That of course is absurd; a pig has four legs, not two; and it has no feathers. Besides, any one could distinguish its note from that of a lark.—Fun.

A VALUABLE ACQUISITION.

Dutiful Nephew: "Oh, uncle, I thought you wouldn't mind my bringing my friend Grigg from our office. He ain't much to look at, and he can't dance, and he don't talk, and he won't play cards—but he's such a mimic!! To-morrow he'll imitate you and Aunt Betsy in a way that'll make all the fellows roar!"—Punch.

SPEAKING BY THE CARD.

Str.—Can you inform me if, when stating anything injurious of another person on a postal card, I am guilty of a libel? It strikes me that if I were to tell you in this way that our friend BENDER-SNATCH was not to be trusted it would be a confidential communication, being strictly between you and me and the post.

Yours respectfully,

To Mr. Punch.

A. BAWBEE.

Punch.

RETROSPECTIVE.

How tasteless is life as we make it.

How wanting in pleasure and worth,

While striving for fame and for profit,

Or living for splendour or mirth;

I sigh for the hopes of my childhood,

That beacon that rose in my view

When 'neath the bowers of the wild wood,

A child, I was artless and true.

Then the breath of the flowers and zephyrs

Inspired my young life with their joy,

And in the broad freedom of nature

I lived a pure, innocent boy,

With thoughts just as pure as the ether

That marks the grand arch of the sky,

Like the stars that shine down beneath her,

So bright was my hope and so high.

How little I knew of the anguish

And hatred and pain I must bear!

How my soul must get tired and languish,

And wrestle with fate, want, and care!

How little there was of true friendship!

How little there was that was right!

How little the world prizes merit!

How evil can triumph through might!

I pause for a moment to rest me,

And think of the hard, bitter past,

And bind up the wounds that distress me,

And wish that they might be the last;

And that, in the incoming future,

True wisdom may mark well my way;

That success, through lessons of failure,

May cheer and refresh me each day.

M. J. P.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

RESTORING WORN BLACK CLOTH.—Use a strongish solution of sequi-carbonate of ammonia to sponge the cloth.

CURING BACON.—To every fourteen pounds of bacon, or ham, use the ordinary quantity of salt, and in addition one ounce and a half each of saltpetre and common soda. The soda prevents that hardness in the lean of the bacon which is so often found, and keeps it mellow all through.

CHAFFIN' HEADS.—This is a Scottish dish of which the name signifies stuffed heads. It consists of the heads of haddock, stuffed with a mixture of oatmeal and suet, flavoured with onions chopped small, and pepper, to which the roes of the haddock are sometimes added. The heads are then placed in a pudding dish with a little suet, sprinkled with oatmeal, and baked in an oven. This was formerly a favourite supper dish in Scotland, and is mentioned in "Gay Mannerings" as one of the good things prepared by the landlady of a village inn for a guest to whom she wished to show particular attention. Although a very pleasant dish, it has however fallen much into disuse.

PHOTOGRAPHERS assert that the only time they succeed in taking a really good likeness is when they come across a face entirely destitute of expression, and with large, heavy and decided features.

A SHOWER OF STONES.—A shower of stones is reported from Rosario, in December. A great tempest was felt, ending in a shower of stones from N.W. to S.W., and doing much damage. The shower lasted ten minutes, and the stones were abundant and large, weighing from a nut in size to a pigeon's egg.

The cornfields have severely suffered. It is remarked the like occurrence had not been seen for many years, so it is to be inferred such a phenomenon is not unknown. As the Bernstadt colony was affected some European observations may be received.

STATISTICS.

It is estimated that the railways of the world are 117,871 miles long, and have cost about 2,250,000,000 sterling.

Not less than 500,000 people in Peru it is estimated observe as many as 50 feast days annually. Fifty times 500,000 are 25,000,000. This then is the number of days actually subtracted from the labour value of the country in one year in this way. Enough of time is yearly expended in feast days in Peru to build a first-class railway every five years.

THE STATE OF THE EXCHEQUER.—According to the weekly Treasury return the receipts into the Exchequer between the 1st April, 1871, and 30th March, 1872, amounted to 71,775,528*l.*, as compared with 67,201,295*l.* last year. They were derived from the following sources:—Customs, 19,542,000*l.*; Excise, 22,715,000*l.*; stamps, 9,359,000*l.*; taxes, 2,201,000*l.*; income-tax, 8,513,000*l.*; Post-office, 4,420,000*l.*; telegraph service, 605,000*l.*; crown lands, 300,000*l.*; and miscellaneous, 3,976,525*l.* The payments in the same period amounted to 67,900,942*l.*; as against 65,164,837*l.* last year. There remained a balance in the Bank of England on March 30th, 1872, of 9,250,946*l.*, and 1,428,978*l.* in that of Ireland. This is the last weekly return but one of the present financial year.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A LIGHTHOUSE is to be erected on Corbière Rock, on the western coast of Jersey.

THERE are 30,000 working men idle in New York this winter.

The Tyne-mouth Corporation are constructing a reservoir to hold 52,000 gallons of salt water.

THE Gazette announces that the Queen's birthday will be kept on Saturday the 1st of June, instead of Wednesday the 15th of May.

EIGHT petitions have been lodged at the House of Commons in favour of the abolition of the income-tax. The signatures number 568.

MR. J. G. CHAMBERS, the champion Cambridge walker, is reported to have undertaken to walk, for a heavy wager, 21 miles in three hours.

The elephant Romeo at Forepaugh's menagerie, Philadelphia, has killed five keepers since 1865. They might give him another name after that.

THE largest ship in the British navy—the Thunderer—is launched. Her dead weight is 10,000 tons.

LEVY, the cornet player, has entered into an engagement to play for Prince Galitzin, in Russia, at a yearly salary of 2,000*l.*

THE Queen's statue is to be unveiled at Bombay this month by the Guicowar of Baroda. The design was submitted to and approved by Her Majesty. The cost has been 15,500*l.*

DISPUTES.—It is an excellent rule to be observed in all disputes that men should give soft words and hard arguments; that they should not so much strive to vex as to convince an opponent.

It has been proposed at Torquay to raise a thanksgiving fund of 500*l.* in commemoration of the recovery of the Prince of Wales, and to add the money to the funded property of the Torbay Infirmary.

GENERAL DE CISEY has just decided that the German language, written and spoken, shall be required from all the candidates for the school of Saint-Oyr, in June, 1873. Admiral Potbury has issued a similar order for the naval school.

THE ORDER OF THE GARTER.—The cost of conferring the Order of the Garter on the Emperor of Brazil was 1,200*l.* The explanation is that when the Order is conferred on Sovereigns its expensive robes are also presented to the monarch decorated with the Garter.

PROPOSED MEMORIAL WINDOW IN ST. PAUL'S BY THE SOCIETY OF ARTS.—In connection with the thanksgiving in St. Paul's for the recovery of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, the council of the Society of Arts, of which the Prince is president, have decided to provide a memorial, in the form of a painted window, to be set up in the cathedral, thus helping at the same time to complete the decorations of the interior of that edifice. The proposal of the council to the members is that a fund for this purpose should be raised among them by subscription, each member of the society being at liberty to subscribe five shillings for himself, and the like sum for each member of his family.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

T. T. S. ("Black Eagle").—The age is too young for a man.

ASHBROOK C. C.—The handwriting is quite good enough for the purpose named.

PAUL M. (Bridgend).—We are unacquainted with the works referred to.

W. J. C. (Belfast).—Your facetiousness, though not amusing, is insufficiently polished for publication.

ROBERT.—Faithfully follow the promptings of your conscience; be true now and evermore, and you will soon be happy.

THE AUTHORS OF SEVERAL NOVELS is thanked for her letter concerning which however we have just now nothing farther to say.

LOUISA H.—I do not undertake the duties about which you inquire. 2. Letters should always bear the address of the writer.

R. S.—We are sorry that you enable us to do no more than acknowledge the receipt of your attempts entitled "The Grave of a Minstrel," and "Speak Truth."

Mrs. J. S.—Astrology is not only out of repute but out of fashion also. It is likewise inferentially condemned by some penal Acts of Parliament.

WORKMAN.—It is probable that we shall hear nothing more of the matter, consequently it is desirable you should dismiss the subject from your mind.

A SAILOR (Portsmouth).—The application is deficient in one necessary particular. Probably it is advisable to wait until the little time referred to has expired.

Mrs. F.—The opinion of eminent surgeons is that tattoo marks properly made cannot be removed without permanent injury to the skin; in which case a mark of some description would always remain.

RICHARD W.—By the law of Scotland, either husband or wife can obtain a complete divorce simply on the ground of wilful desertion for four years together without just cause.

INQUIRITIVE.—1. You can obtain the work referred to through any bookseller; he will procure it if you order; the price is about half-a-guinea. 2. The writing is neat and free.

L. F.—Kid gloves are cleaned by being placed on a model hand and then washed with spirits of turpentine. They are hung first in a warm place and afterwards where there is a current of air in order that the odour of the turpentine may pass off.

MARTON.—1. We believe the herb you refer to, in conjunction with a judicious combination of salts of tartar and ammonia, makes a wash which is beneficial to the hair. 2. Your handwriting is very good; it is certainly not without style, though yet it is not stylish.

POOR TOM.—Amateur varnish making is an expensive and difficult task. As economy is an object with you, proceed to an oil-and-colour warehouse and purchase ready made the polishes required. You will of course explain the objects you propose to accomplish. Lac and sandarach are the bases of most French polishes. Amber dissolved in oil of turpentine would make an oak varnish.

DOVER.—We are afraid your expectations are not likely to be gratified. The individual of whom you write in all probability would think twice on the subject; his income may be insufficient for those elegancies and amusements to which you wisely or otherwise aspire, even if his inclination led him in that direction. Perhaps you have not read the expression of his wishes with sufficient consideration.

J. M. 138.—1. The address of "London" is sufficient to add to the name of the firm about which you inquire. 2. Whatever truth or science there may be in Mesmerism (if any) and its concomitant phenomena can be only learned by a course of study under a professor of the mysteries. 3. We have never met with a history the woodcut illustrations of which are coloured in the way you describe. If a second copy is in existence it will probably only be found in the hands of some industrious amateur like yourself.

W. K.—It is usual for a man about to start in business for himself to carry out that intention without at the same time involving himself in the anxieties of courtship. "One thing at a time" is a motto that may be quoted with advantage in reply to your letter. We suggest that you should first make as sure as you can of your position in the world; when that is found to be comfortable look out for a wife. The young ladies will be less perplexed by knowing what you are than by considering what you may be.

A CONSTANT PURCHASER.—Naturally your first step is to write a polite letter, embodying complete particulars of

your claim, to the persons who are in possession of the property. Probably a correspondence would then take place which might end in the satisfaction of your claim if it is justly founded. You should only resort to a solicitor when you find there is an indisposition to deal fairly by you; if you should deem it necessary to consult him be most particular to make your statement with scrupulous accuracy, in order that you may not deceive either him or yourself.

J. C. R. HARRIETTE FERN, JOHN K. and S. C.—These correspondents having addressed us on the same subject one answer will suffice for the four letters. Probably the writer of the paragraph meant to say, "Wild thyme tea," and the centre word has by some inadvertence been omitted. As far as we can judge, and we have searched through many volumes, wild tea is unknown to botanists; by which we mean to say that the plant named *tea* is a cultivated plant. Another solution of the difficulty may be that the specific recommended is a decoction made from the tea plant in its natural state before the leaves go through the processes of drying, sifting, roasting, and twisting employed in the manufacture of the article.

WILD BEES AND SKIN.—Although it goes against the grain to postpone even for a little while compliance with the request of two such very nice young ladies, we really feel bound to do so in the above cases. We earnestly wish you to get married, but we do not want you to be burdened with the cares of wedded life until you are out of your teens. Spend this part of your time in earnest study, observation, and questionings of all sorts. You can devote the next twenty years to love, and, if life be prolonged, the third twenty years can be devoted to extending to others the same counsel and help which you have received from your friends and experience combined. But just now learn, learn, learn! Of course if the longest-for one will woo now you must submit, but don't be after inviting him to do so.

JUDGMENT.

Ah, Love! thou art a judge unjust;
Though painted blind, thou canst well see.
Nor is it safe mortals should construe
The fairness of thy fond decree.

For thou wilt not cold, calm proof heed,
But cast it utterly aside,
Descending from thy seat to plead
The cause thou dost as judge decide.

What mockery of justice this!
How truth fails such a tide to stem
When the light touch of one fond kiss
Weighs more than facts that could condemn!

When one tear in the love-life eye,
However deeply it hath sinned,
Makes just resolves and reasons fly
As leaves before the wintry wind!
One suffering sigh, one pleading look,
Will make justice itself forswear
Wrongs that would fill a mammoth book,
All noted with exactest care.

Ah, Love! thou shouldst thy seat resign,
Yielding Justice thy proper place;
And yet a heart so soft as mine
Could not condemn a sad, sweet face.

B.

EMILY H.—If change of air and habits cannot be taken, or, being taken, do not avail, you should then obtain the opinion of a physician. The writing is very formal, and in its way excellent, but it is not a lady's hand. For the hair we can only recommend the old-fashioned curl-papers, and some of the ordinary pomade sold by perfumers.

F. C.—The manuscript is quite unsuitable. The incidents, every one of them, are in the highest degree improbable; while the moral, that a young lady by merely dropping a jewel from her finger is likely to bring upon herself a very heavy punishment, is greatly overstrained. With such defects it is unnecessary to dwell upon other artistic demerits of the sketch, which are rendered unusually prominent by the absence of all character and variety in a space which should have been very carefully filled in.

BILL FIREBAR, twenty-three, 5ft. 6in., light hair, hazel eyes, and in the Navy. Respondent must be about twenty-two, affectionate, and able to wash a shirt.

NELLIE, twenty-two, middling height, fair, with gray eyes, would like to marry a young man who is tall, dark, very affectionate, steady, and has a moderate income.

BILL BUNTING, twenty, 5ft. 6in., dark, good looking, and a signalman in the Navy. Respondent must be good looking, and of a loving disposition.

E. F., forty-three, 5ft. 6in., a widower, and rather dark. Respondent must be about forty, of an amiable disposition, fond of home, and with some means.

L. H., nineteen, tall, fair hair, dark eyes, would make a good wife. Respondent must be dark, and about twenty-eight; a publican preferred.

G. G. T., twenty-one, medium height, gray eyes, brown hair, loving, and a domestic servant. Respondent must be dark, loving, and able to keep a wife.

LUCE D., twenty-six, tall, dark hair, blue eyes, fair complexion, wishes to marry a tall young gentleman; money not so much an object as a comfortable home.

ADA W., twenty-four, medium height, dark hair and eyes, good looking, wishes to marry a tall, fair young man, in a good position, and fond of music.

LOVELY, twenty-two, middle height, dark hair, light blue eyes, pretty, and fond of home. Respondent must be dark, tall, good looking; a doctor preferred.

JOYFUL HARRY, twenty-three, dark eyes, light hair, and musical. Respondent must be dark, medium height, loving, and fond of children.

MAUD M., twenty-three, fair, and domesticated, would like to marry an educated, dark gentleman, not more than twenty-six years of age.

JAMES HINER, twenty-four, tall, fair, good looking, and in receipt of a good income. Respondent must be not over twenty, medium height, dark, accomplished, and have a little money.

L. V., twenty-five, tall, fair, good looking, used to good society, wishes to marry a tall, dark, good-looking, and steady young man, who is of a kind and loving disposition, in a good position, and fond of music.

A. J., twenty-three, tall, a soldier's daughter, dark brown hair, gray eyes, would make an industrious wife to a good husband. Respondent should be a steady soldier, likely to be going to the East Indies.

JESSIE, nineteen, medium height, fair, blue eyes, light hair, with a loving heart, fond of home, and good tempered. Respondent must be a steady, sober young man about twenty-four, and able to keep a wife comfortably.

PAOR, an Irish girl, tall, stout, pleasing appearance, very good tempered, and fond of home, wishes to meet with a suitable partner for life; would like the gentleman to be tall and dark, about twenty-six years of age; whiskers indispensable.

VICTORIA, twenty-nine, fair, auburn hair, good tempered, cheerful, and capable of making an industrious working-man's home happy. Respondent should be a mechanic, about thirty-three, dark, and fond of home and music.

SAN SHEDDONS, twenty-nine, medium height, dark, good musician, and fond of home, wishes to marry a rather tall, dark young lady about twenty-four, fond of children, domesticated, able to make a home comfortable, and have money.

BOLEYS, twenty-seven, medium height, respectively connected, dark, curling hair, loving and lively disposition, musical, and would make a good wife. Respondent must be dark and about twenty-nine, good tempered, affectionate, and fond of music.

M. L., twenty-four, medium height, dark hair and eyes, handsome, accomplished, and very fond of home and children. Respondent must be not more than twenty-nine, rather tall, dark, good looking, and in receipt of a good income.

K. G., twenty-eight, 5ft. 7in., dark eyes, would appreciate endeavours to make a home comfortable. Respondent must be fond of home, possess some money, be good looking, of a kind and gentle disposition, unchangeable, and strictly economical.

JESSIE CARLOTTA, twenty, medium height, dark hair, blue eyes, good looking, domesticated, accomplished, and good tempered, would like to marry a dark gentleman, about twenty-five, tall, good tempered, and in a good position.

LILLY, medium height, fair, blue eyes, pretty, happy disposition, accomplished in music and singing, and domesticated. Respondent must be tall, dark, loving, fond of home and music, in a good position in London preferred, and about twenty-five.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

TOM BOWLER is responded to by—"Ann S.," who has kept house for her father; she is eighteen, 5ft. 4in., dark, dark hair and eyes, and would love a sailor dearly.

ALFRED S. by—"Elizabeth A.," twenty, medium height, light brown hair.

LILLIAN by—"John Skysail," twenty, tall, fair, and has hazel eyes.

BOWLAND by—"Ruth," twenty-four, tall, cheerful, domesticated, dark, curly hair, and dark eyes.

ANNIE by—"Bachelor," thirty, tall, slender, fair, light hair, trade—light manufacturing business.

TOM M. by—"B. A.," twenty-four, dark brown hair, blue eyes, of an affectionate disposition, and has a little money.

TRINUNCULO by—"Emma M.," twenty-three, medium height, dark, domesticated, able to use the scrubbing brush or the back-scrub brush.

B. H. by—"Gipsy," twenty-seven, 5ft. 2in., dark brown hair, hazel eyes, dark complexion, fond of music, loving, and fond of home.

J. J. by—"Harriet," twenty-eight, a servant, can cook a dinner, manage a home, and would make a good and loving wife.

MOSCOW and VICTOR by—"Annie," twenty-two, medium height, brown hair, hazel eyes, and very good looking, who thinks she would suit "Moscow," and "Alice," twenty-nine, tall, fair hair, blue eyes, graceful, and pretty, who thinks she would suit "Victor."

HENRY C. by—"Carrie," twenty-one, medium height, a domestic servant, dark, passable looking, respectable, and is sure she could make a good wife; by—"Nellie," twenty-five, medium height, fair, a domestic servant, who is very loving, and would make "Henry" a good wife; by—"Cook," twenty-four, domesticated, a good house-keeper, would make a loving wife, and thinks she is all "Henry C." requires; and by—"Tilly S.," twenty-one, tall, fair, very affectionate, and a domestic servant.

A HOME LOVER wishes to hear more of "Pallion T. H." BRIGHT EYES writes to us saying she would like to hear from "Tom B." who she thinks would suit her.

The following cannot be inserted—"Poor but Honest," "Polly," "Emily," "H. H.," "Maggie C.," and "The Boring Irish Boy."

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